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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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One Complete Novel and Two Complete Novelettes

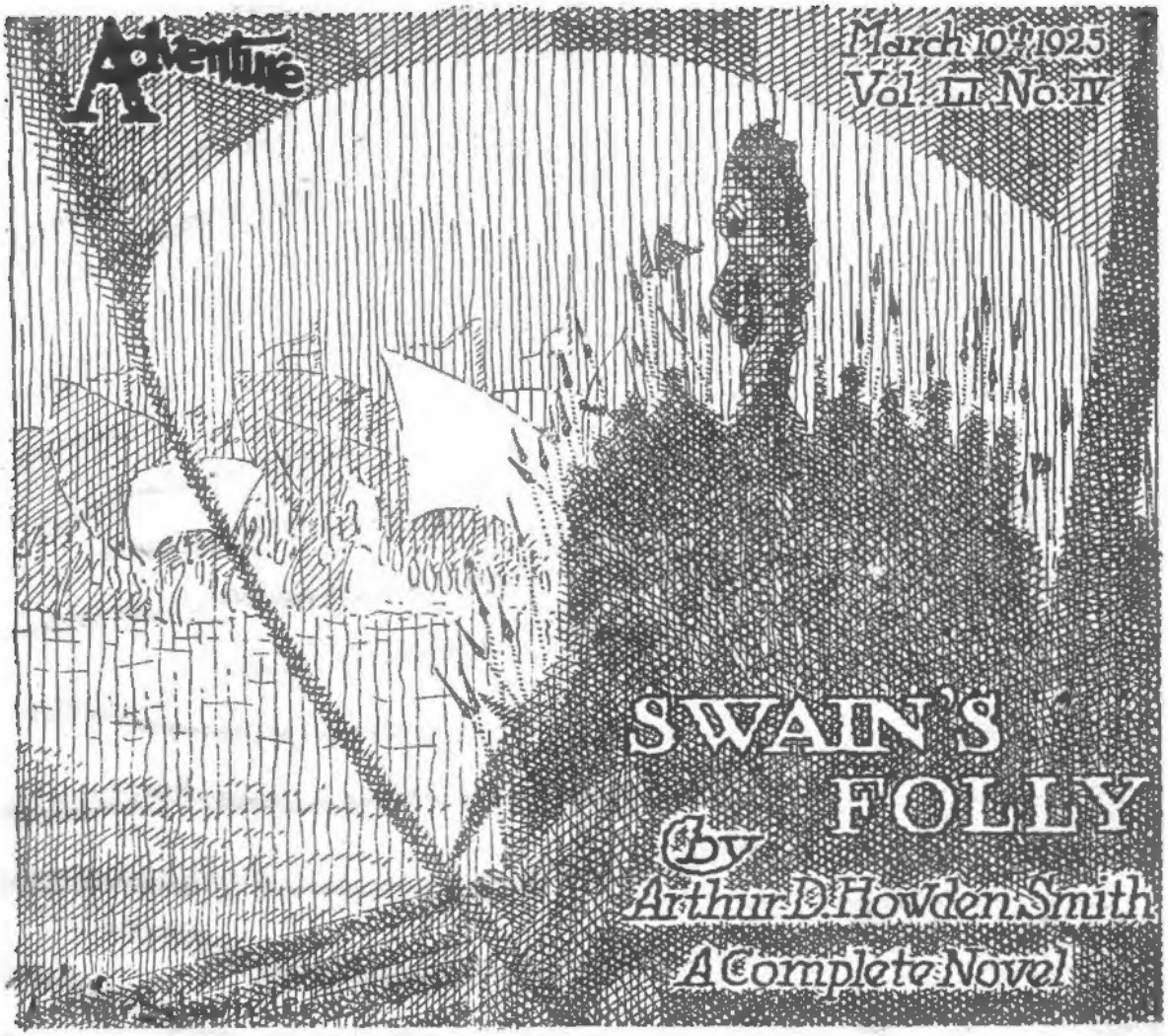
MEN called *Robert Thorne*, the "Mad Cosmographer," but little did they know what his maps were worth; nor did they know that his son would batter down the *"Fox's"* insidious political intrigue, by his venture into the land of "THE SNOW DRIVER." This novel, by Harold Lamb, of the days of King Edward the Sixth, is complete in the next issue.

THE Indians respected "the company," but they feared *Joe Moon* and loved his whisky. He laid waste the Missabi country until *Munroe* the factor left his post in midwinter to hunt down the fur-pirate. "THE RIVER TRAIL," a complete novelette by Leslie MacFarlane is in the next issue.

HE REFUSED to leave the *Blackfish* when the skipper ordered the crew to abandon ship, and as the boats drew clear he dangled a two-inch auger over the side—an auger he had found in the captain's bunk. "THE WAR CATS OF DUGAN O'DAY," is a complete novelette by John Webb in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**



Author of "Swain's Inlawing," "Swain's Kingsbane," etc.

"IT IS folly, Swain!" exclaimed Jarl Harald. "What? Leave your own interests here in the Orkneys to return to the welter of bloodshed and strife in Norway? I should call any man foolish who did so, but you particularly, for you must know better than others what it means, seeing that you devoted several years and much effort and skill to the slaying of King Ingi's foes and the union of the Norse folk under his rule. And now these same folk are up in arms again, fighting and burning one another, with your best friends, Gregorius Dag's son and Erling Skakki (Wryneck) at the head of the opposing factions! Two men who fought shield to shield with you for Ingi, and who——"

"No, no," remonstrated Swain. "You have not grasped the truth of the matter, Harald. Gregorius and Erling are no longer friends, it appears, and for that I am as sorrowful as you; but they are not in arms against each other. Hark to the scalds here, who fetched me the message from King Ingi."

He turned in his chair and addressed the two men who sat at his left hand, one very tall and gravely handsome, with a languid, debonair grace, the other short in stature and possessed of a wrinkled visage like a merry, brown mask. All men in the North countries knew Armod the Scald and Oddi the Little, famous alike for their scaldcraft, their valor as warriors, their wisdom as counselors and the friendship which bound them together. They were the cupmates of chiefs and kings, welcome at every court and honored in every skalli.

"You have heard the Jarl, scalds," said Swain, "but he has not heard you, seeing he

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arrived but a moment since and has barely drained his welcoming horn. Tell him all, even as you told me."

Armod inclined his head, very stately in manner. Oddi bobbed his, eyes twinkling with the mirth that seldom left them.

The Jarl leaned forward across the oaken top of the high table on the dais, which he shared alone with Swain, his host, and these two.

"Yes, tell all," he commanded eagerly. "This is a sorry business. Who would have expected the like! And I do maintain, as I have said, that it is folly for Swain to commit himself to the service of a king like Ingi, who cannot maintain the crown Swain fastened on his brows once, twice and again."

Swain laughed shortly.

"Folly, do you say? Humph! I am not a man to suffer others to undo the work I set my heart upon—and if I fastened Ingi's crown 'once, twice and again,' why not a fourth time?"

"He is a cripple," snapped the Jarl. "How can a crippled king hold the allegiance of the Norsefolk? Why, your messengers gave you the answer!"

"He is no fool, Ingi," returned Swain, "nor coward, either. I have known worse. Of three Norse kings I have had to do with, one I slew, one I caused to be slain, the third—Ingi—I gave friendship to. He was the best of the three. You are sufficiently well acquainted with me to judge whether or not I would refuse you aid if you ever appealed to me when your foes ringed you around. Why, then, should you expect me to refuse Ingi, who would have died years ago but for me, and who, whatever his ailments, has never refused to take the brave man's path when I accompanied him? Yes, and who will go that same path, with or without me! By the old gods, he is a man, that King, humpbacked and clubfooted though he be!"

Swain's deep voice boomed through the hall of the skalli, a high-roofed, spacious room, where scores of men sat at their evening meat, his own housecarls and the servants who had attended the Jarl hither. And the folk on the benches nudged one another and stared furtively at the high table, aloof on its dais.

"Never was there man like Swain to talk boldly to Jarls and all great ones," they murmured as they drank the ale.

One of Jarl Harald's archers wagged his head forebodingly.

"Swain is a hard man! Yes, a hard man. Did you hear him swear by the old gods? Now, if Bishop William were alive——"

"Bishop William was Swain's cousin and true friend," rasped Erik Skallagrim's son, Swain's forecastleman and steward. "Many a time I have heard Swain say he was the one priest he had any use for. But then Bishop William was a viking farer in his day."

"Ah, very likely, very likely," agreed the Jarl's boat-tender. "Still, I do maintain, also, that none but Swain would dare to swear so in the Jarl's face. For, look you, the Jarl is a Christian Jarl, and——"

"Bah!" growled Erik. "Christian or no, what does that matter to Swain? Why, what he is, Swain made him!"

"No doubt," conceded the archer who had spoken before. "No man can deny it. And the Jarl, himself, has said, as did his cousin, Jarl Rognvald—God rest *his* soul! that 'a Jarl is a small matter to Swain.' "

There was an outburst of low chuckles at this, in which the Jarl's men joined.

"Nevertheless," said the boat-tender, "all that has been said bears out what I undertook to maintain when I first spoke, which is that Swain is more powerful than the Jarl or any man in the North, albeit himself he had no title."

"Mark you," chimed in the archer, "it was not to the Jarl that King Ingi sent for help, but to Swain!"

"'When the wind is from the North, watch out for snow,' said the fishermen!" gibed Erik.

"Well, be it funny or sad," quoth the archer defiantly, "we folk from the Jarl's stead at Orphir will maintain that Swain dwells here on isle Gairsey in more state than our lord—who is also Swain's lord!"

"That is as it should be," retorted Erik. "The Jarl would be first to acclaim Swain for his achievements. He looks up to Swain as to an elder brother. As for Swain's wealth, he won it in viking cruises and by serving Ingi and the Jarls here at home. No man has a more honorable record."

"Oh, granted," admitted the Archer.

"It is widely know that the king would have named him Jarl had he wished it," cried the boat-tender.

"Having said which there is no more to

say," rapped Erik. "Haste with your meat, carls, and then clear the skalli that Swain and the Jarl may talk undisturbed."

On the dais the Jarl was answering Swain's last statement.

"I will not deny to Ingi all the merit he deserves, and if he might remain king I should be as pleased as you; but it is past dispute that since he set out to seize the power he shared with his brothers, Sigurd and Eystein, there has been one war after another. And you, who have been his principal adviser, are as much responsible as he, Swain."

"I do not seek to evade responsibility," replied Swain calmly. "There would have been war between the brothers in any case, for both Sigurd and Eystein plotted to betray Ingi, and then, having accomplished so much, they would have assailed each other in turn. Moreover, of the three, as I have said, Ingi was the wisest and the seemliest. He is a good king, and deserves well of his folk."

The Jarl flung himself back in his chair.

"Well, well, we go no further along a tangled road when we walk blind," he said. "I will hear what the scalds have to say."

Armod and Oddi exchanged glances. Then Armod waved one hand with an effect of utter weariness.

"Speech comes readiest to your lips, Oddi," he murmured. "If your memory lapses——"

He permitted the sentence to conclude in a second gesture, equally vague.

Oddi's merry smile became more pronounced.

"As to memory," he began, "it is not difficult to recall ill news. The man who errs is he who had glad tidings to relate. Briefly, Lord Jarl, matters have fallen out in this wise:

"Last summer, as you well know, the king, with Swain's assistance, was enabled so to entrap King Eystein that Eystein's folk fell away from him, and Eystein was compelled to flee us without a battle. Swain organized a pursuit, and Simon Skalp, who came over to our side from Eystein's array, discovered the king in the forest on the borders of Viken and had Eystein slain by one of his housecarls.

"Those of Eystein's chiefs who escaped us proclaimed as his successor young Hakon Herdabreid (Broadshoulders), who was son to King Sigurd, whom Swain slew in the street fray in Bergen, which was the real beginning of Ingi's power. Our folk gave scant attention to Hakon, seeing that he was but a youth, and in this Swain was concerned as much as——"

"I bade Ingi's folk watch out for Hakon," interrupted Swain. "But I did not reckon on the breach that came betwixt Gregorius and Erling, who are Ingi's two most powerful chiefs."

"Nor did any of us," assented Oddi. "But with Hakon was Olivir Rosta (Roysterer) who is Swain's bitter enemy, and who——"

Swain's great fist clenched as it lay on the table. His blue eyes flamed icily; his ruddy beard bristled.

"MY ENEMY!" he repeated, almost sneering. "By Loki, God of Evil, whose servant Olvir is, I live only to compass his destruction. Murderer of my father and mother and both my brothers, it is little enough for me to remember that I burned his grandmother whom men called Frakork the Witch. But he will not stand to face me, Lord Jarl. From one end of the world to the other I have chased him, and whenever I come to handgrips with him he contrives to evade me. I thought I had him in this last struggle between Ingi and Eystein, but he was one of the few of Eystein's folk who escaped.

"Well, soon or late, his doom will come into my hand. I have sworn it! Not by, torment, not by fire, not by arrow or spear but by sword's edge shall I slay him. Ha! On with your tale, Oddi."

The little scald quaffed the ale horn in front of him.

"It is not necessary for me to say more of Olvir than that he is with Hakon," he resumed. "He and Sigurd of Reyr are the young king's wits, their's the brains that think for him. And it is to be said that he could not have wilier, craftier counselors."

"It is well said!" affirmed the Jarl grimly. "I have heard also of Sigurd. He is a brave man and well beloved in Norway, and his relatives are powerful."

"So powerful," said Oddi, "that he and Olvir have been able to pry loose many of those whose adherence to Ingi was given through fear, rather than from good faith."

"A king who has been forced to climb to power over the bodies of his two brothers must reckon upon acquiring enemies who

will stir from cover whenever they believe there is a chance of his undoing," growled Swain.

"So it is!" cried Oddi. "All through the late summer and the beginning of winter Olvir and Sigurd carried Hakon the length and breadth of the country, keeping to untraveled ways, and telling everyone how brave and kindly he was. In which last, they spoke the truth. He is a handsome young king, modest, good to look upon, affable, generous."

"Virtues he did not inherit from his father or his uncle," commented Swain.

"Wherever he got them, they have stood him in good case," said Oddi. "He has been a notable sword winner. His army has grown apace. And now that spring is come he will be trying conclusions with Ingi. We should have no fear of him if our folk held together. But they do not, and that is a tale by itself."

"Of the beginning whereof I can testify," interposed Swain again. "I recall that when we held counsel with King Ingi as to the plan he should adopt toward disposing of Eystein, Erling—who is always disposed toward caution—inquired what use it would be to slay him, seeing that his followers would only set up another king in his stead to plague us."

"Which it seems they have done," observed the Jarl.

"Yes," admitted Swain. "It could not be avoided; the main thing to consider was that so long as Eystein lived he would be called king by many folk. The only way to take the crown from him, and with the crown the power and control over property, was to slay him. Therefore, I was for slaying him, and so I counseled Ingi. As for this new king, in time we will slay him, and then——"

"Ingi's enemies will set up still another king," said Harl Harald sarcastically.

"Perhaps. But in time we will so discourage these rebel kings that they will give over the attempt to share the rule. However, that is not what I started to speak about. Erling was for caution in dealing with Eystein, and Gregorius, who is as impulsive as Erling is moderate, cried out at him that he was always 'thinking of more kings,' and asked him if he could not forget his son—Erling's wife is the Princess Kristin, daughter to King Sigurd the Crusader, and therefor their son is as good an heir as Ingi has."

"Gregorius did ill to jeer at Erling," said the Jarl. "Erling has an excellent reputation as a warrior."

"Past doubt," agreed Swain. "But on such little things do men's actions turn. The two were never good friends afterward, and by what the scalds tell me the breach between them widened through the winter until it is become a gulf."

"Yes," said Armod at this point, joining in the conversation for the first time, "but Oddi has not told you that the reason for the further widening of the breach was Erling's disapproval of the policy Gregorius adopted of friendship with Simon Skalp, the slayer of Eystein, and those other chiefs who left Eystein for Ingi. Erling told Ingi that he demeaned himself by admitting them to as much familiarity as his stoutest friends enjoyed, because they, who had practically betrayed Eystein, were hated by all Norsemen, which was the truth."

"By ——, I should hope so," exclaimed the Jarl warmly. "I should think twice before I drank ale in Simon's company."

"So said Ingi," cried Oddi. "But Gregorius said that the way to unite the land was to draw into the king's friendship as many as possible of those who had been his enemies. And the end of it all was that Ingi accepted Simon, and Gregorius made Simon and Simon's friends his closest associates."

"And thereupon Erling went off to his farm at Studla, in Etne," said Armod, "declaring that he would have naught to do with Ingi so long as he accepted Gregorius' advice. Nor has he. The king bade Oddi and me go to him in Passion Week, with a message of kindly remembrance, bidding him to court, and Erling answered us that there was no place for him at court when he might rub elbows with Simon Skalp."

There was an interval of silence.

"The old story," proclaimed the Jarl. "Two men of great power can not share it equally. If Gregorius and Erling had not quarreled over Simon they would have found another excuse."

"But Ingi has not despaired of making them friends again," said Oddi. "It was partly for that he bade us, when we returned from Studla, fare westward oversea and acquaint Swain how matters went with him. 'For,' said the king, 'the last word I had of Swain was that he would use the money I gave him to buy arms and train

housecarls, in case I had need of him again.'"

"My words," growled Swain. "Also, I said that the Norsefolk grew restless at peace and were too well accustomed to having more than one king to quarrel over to settle down quietly under one. Do you remember, scalds?"

Armod nodded. Oddi said yes.

"But I did not think the fools would fall out so soon," pursued Swain. "And I gave Gregorius and Erling credit for more sense than they possess. I can see that, with one thing and another, I am confronting a harder task than any I have yet assailed."

The Jarl crashed his fist upon the table.

"You say what is in my mind, Swain! What folly to thrust yourself again into such a whirlpool as is Norway today. Your friends are divided. Ingi can not keep the power you won for him. Why should you venture yourself in a hopeless undertaking? You have broad lands to farm here on Gairsey and elsewhere in the islands, as well as on the Scots main. You can win more plunder viking faring than King Ingi can afford to give you. I say it is folly for you to waste more time with the Norsefolk. Let them broil as they please over what concerns them. It is not your affair."

But Swain shook his head slowly.

"You do not understand," he answered—very patiently, for him. "I am bound to go."

"Bound to go?" repeated Jarl Harald, puzzled.

"Yes, bound to go. There is my word. I promised Ingi——"

"Oh, that is well enough, if he was in trouble through adversity," protested the Jarl. "But by all you tell me, and the scalds, too, you placed him firmer on the throne than any king since Harald Haardrada, and he was not man enough to maintain himself."

"He is a man, is Ingi," replied Swain, still unruffled. "I will do for him what I would for no other—save yourself, Harald. I do not blame him for this trouble he is in. It is the Norsefolk. I know them at first hand. Turbulent, broiling, jealous, they are always eager for sword music. Eystein was the last King who attempted viking faring, and he made a poor success of it. He must be a clever warrior who can wring booty from the Southlands today.

"The scalds already call me the last of the Orkney vikings, even as Eystein was last viking king in Norway. But the Norsefolk must fight and plunder, and if they can not fare oversea they vent their wrath upon one another. That is why I say the land must be united under one king. Until there is one strong king they will foray and plunder, the uplands against the dales, the dales against the fjordfolk, the fjordfolk against the seaside."

"You are an Orkneyman," declared Jarl Harald. "Let a Norseman succor the Norsefolk."

"And if this was not reason enough," continued Swain as if the Jarl had not spoken, "I would go to help Ingi because Olvir Rosta is for Hakon."

That terrible cold light that had flared in his eyes once before leaped up again.

"Olvir has one side in any broil or issue: The side opposed to me. The king he fights for is my enemy; his enemy is my friend."

The Jarl wavered.

"It is folly, Swain, blind folly. I know the signs, as do you. When a king's two chief followers fall out, beware of that king's fortunes."

"I consider that Ingi's fortunes are in a bad way," admitted Swain coolly. "But I hope to bring Gregorius and Erling to see that their joint interests lie in common. And in any event I have faced heavier odds than Olvir and Hakon can bring against me. As for the folly of what I do, I should rather commit folly and be honorable than act wisely and leave myself open to the reproaches of honorable men."

Armod started from his chair, a flush kindling in his ordinarily pale cheeks.

"By the blessed Olaf's fame, there spoke the Swain whose deeds I am honored to sing!" he cried. "Say no more, Lord Jarl. It might be said that you had said too much."

"Too much or too little," rejoined the Jarl doggedly, "I have spoken for Swain's best interest."

"So you think, Lord Jarl," put in Oddi the Little. "But in Swain's shoes you would practice the same folly."

II

THIS Swain Olaf's son was only a *bondi*, farmer, in the Orkneys, but he had risen to the possession of a power beyond that enjoyed by any man without title; indeed, it was often said of

him that he wielded more power than any man uncrowned in the North. In his early life he had occasion to measure strength with the Orkney Jarls, and by one means or another he so contrived that he always had his will with them.

He was noted as a viking farer, and had made voyages to many distant lands, either

in pursuit of Olvir Rosta, with whom he waged a continual feud, or in search of plunder or news of Olvir's whereabouts. For, whenever Swain pursued Olvir too closely it was the Roysterer's custom to disappear for a period. Again and again, Olvir congratulated himself that he had won clear of Swain, but in a year or perhaps two Swain would appear and harry him forth of his security.

The last time this had happened Olvir had vanished into the country of the heathen Letts, but after a while he wearied of an exile so savage and barren of amusement and he reappeared in Norway at the court of King Eystein, and lent himself to the intrigues by means of which Eystein was seeking to undermine the growing might of King Ingi, his crippled brother, whose most intimate counselor was Swain.

But Swain had worsted Olvir in a seafight, from which the Roysterer had barely escaped with a single ship, and afterward had so contrived as to induce the most of Eystein's folk to desert him, with the consequence that Eystein had been obliged to flee from Swain in Olvir's company. And the chase becoming too keen for their comfort, Olvir had not scrupled to desert the king to enhance his own chance of safety. In fact, he had succeeded in escaping, whereas the king was taken, as has been set forth.

Knowing that he might never expect peace from King Ingi or Swain, Olvir had promptly set himself to building an instrument for his own protection against such powerful adversaries, and to this end he employed the best means he had at hand, namely, the young King Hakon, a bastard son of King Sigurd, whom Swain had slain—and in slaying, earned the name of "Kingsbane." Hakon was ripe for Olvir's purpose. Ardent, brave, educated to hate Ingi and Swain for his father's death, the boy was hot to raise his banner and win a crown.

Profiting by the waxing distemper that separated Gregorius and Erling, Olvir was able to forge ahead with his new king at a rate faster than he had hoped. Swain had returned to the Orkneys as soon as Eystein was dead, for Swain was desirous not to expose Ingi to the charge of ruling by the support of outlanders, a charge that had been brought once before.

Without Swain to counsel him, many influential families, sore over the deaths of relatives and friends or fines imposed for their opposition, had drawn away from King Ingi, and families that had been loyal hitherto were offended by the advancement Gregorious obtained for Simon Skalp and other chiefs who had sold their assistance to the crippled king.

Restless young men, disappointed by the shortness of the recent struggle, had flocked to Hakon's standard. Another group of *lendermen*, either kin to Erling or personally hostile to Gregorius, had stayed away from court because of the quarrel between his two chief advisers.

With matters in this wise, King Ingi had been pleased to receive a visit from the two scalds, Armod and Oddi, who had come from Swain, the first week after the cessation of

the winter gales, to inquire how the king did, for Swain had heard scattered rumors passed by word of mouth from merchants that all was not well in Norway.

Ingi's first move had been to send the scalds to Erling, in hope that the Wry-necked—he was so called because of an old wound that made him carry his head on one side—would listen to them, as friends of Swain, and consent to their plea that he wait upon the King in Bergen.

But Erling, slow and cautious in most matters and not easily moved to wrath, was as stubborn as a bear once he had been aroused. He refused absolutely to concern himself with Ingi's affairs as long as the king followed the advice of Gregorius or kept Gregorius about his person or allowed Simon Skalp to attend him.

"I have my son's future to think of," said Erling. "If he is ever to be King of Norway it cannot be said of him that his father agreed to be friendly with traitors or accepted belittling remarks from Gregorius Dag's son."

No matter how much the scalds argued with him, he could not recede from this position, and so in the end they returned to Bergen to report to King Ingi that they had accomplished no good.

"I did not think it likely that you would," the king comforted them. "But now I would have you sail back to the Orkneys as fast as oars and winds will carry you, and bid Swain come to me. Tell him I am in worse case than when he first joined forces with me, and aided me to win men's respect. For in those days I had fallen so low that I could scarce fall lower, but now, thanks to his help, I am the highest of all men, and my fall will rock the country and ruin my friends."

Armod and Oddi agreed to take this word to Swain; the king gave them the fastest *snekke*, cutter, on Bergen strand, and with a favoring wind they made the return voyage in three days.

Swain said at once that he would wait upon the king, but he felt it necessary to discuss his plans with Jarl Harald, because he had given the Jarl to understand that he would bide at home in the Orkneys that summer and punish certain freebooters from the Sudreyar, Hebrides, who had been plundering the outlying islands. He sent word to the Jarl, inviting him to visit at Gairsey, and the Jarl had come the very next day—with what result already has been told.

In the outcome Swain decided that he would fare for Norway two days after, taking with him only sufficient men to provide a crew for his dragon *Deathbringer*, since he was convinced from the reports of the scalds that it was not advisable to introduce any considerable body of outlanders into the quarrel which was vexing the kingdom.

He likewise placated Jarl Harald by lending the Jarl five longships, with crews and equipment complete, to employ against the Sudreyar raiders. And when this had been done, and Jarl Harald had agreed to care for Swain's two young sons and oversee the administration of his lands, Swain mustered his crew aboard *Deathbringer*, with the two scalds beside him on the poop and Erik Skallagrim's son on the forecastle over the spearmen and archers there, and they thrust out from Gairsey strand about midday with a brisk beam wind off the Aurrida Fjord.

Jarl Harald was hostile to his going to the very last. And as was frequently said by the Orkneyfolk that summer:

"No man but Swain would fare on a king's quarrel in despite of a Jarl's humor."

But Swain cared naught for Jarl or king, unless it pleased him to agree with them. He did what he wished, fared as he pleased. And to the Jarl's parting remonstrance he answered:

"If it be folly to follow honor and strike at my enemy, then I am wedded to folly. I would rather have her to wife than any woman I ever knew."

This brought the first smile to the Jarl's lips.

"Ha, Swain," he exclaimed, as they handfasted, "it is well known how little you think of women!"

"This folly of mine is no friend to women," retorted Swain grimly, "but a gray widow-maker and lass-breaker. There will be red work of it yet."

III

SWAIN surveyed the empty anchorage off Bergen strand with a frowning dissatisfaction. A few East Country traders, an Englishman or two, one slabsided Daneman. Where were the longships? A second scrutiny revealed a group

of lean hulls between two wharves at the other end of the town, half a dozen or so; but there was no mustering of sea crawlers such as was to be expected when war threatened the land.

His brows knit in thought. A bad outlook! King Ingi's estate had been far different a few short months ago.

"Ho, Erik!" he summoned his forecastleman. "Take command while I go ashore. Company? I want none save Armod and Oddi."

With the two scalds he descended into the small boat towed astern of the dragon, took the oars himself, and pulled with slow, powerful strokes across the sun glinting expanse of water to a wharf at the foot of a steep street leading up to the skalli above which floated the king's banner. A score of the townfolk gathered on the wharf to watch him land, and they all exclaimed as they recognized him.

"It is Swain, carls!"

"Swain of the Orkneyar—Orkneys—is come again!"

"Ingi's plight is not so bad if the Orkneyman lends him a shield."

One, a merchant named Gutorm Einar's son, stepped boldly up to Swain as the Orkneyman landed.

"It is to be said that your coming will lift a heavy load from the king's heart, Swain," said Gutorm. "Also, it is agreeable to the most humble of us Bergenfolk."

"I told the king I would come if he summoned me, and I have come," answered Swain gruffly. "But how is it that he seems to lack any aid except lip service?"

The Bergenman flushed.

"We will fight for him, if it is necessary," he said, "but until today there has been nobody to make a plan and say what the folk should do. Erling and all his friends are hugging their skalli fires. Gregorius goes back and forth from the uplands to the seaside, pursuing young Hakon Herdabreid or the last rumor of him. The king sits here in Bergen, biting his thumb and cursing the *lendermen*, barons, who either refuse to aid him or watch to see whether it will be to their advantage to join him or Hakon."

"Are those the king's ships?"

Swain pointed to the group of longships between the two wharves, the only war vessels along the strand.

"They belong to Simon Skalp and Haldor Brynjolf's son."

Swain's fist knotted into a ball.

"Simon and Haldor, who sold out Eystein to Ingi between them—and afterward slew him for Ingi's reward!" he snarled.

The merchant shrugged his shoulders.

"At the least, it can be said of them that having once sold out to Ingi they are faithful to him," he reminded.

"They are faithful because they know well that Hakon's side have for them but one price—and that a bloody one," ripped Swain. "Come, scalds, the king has need of us."

And he strode off up the street toward the king's skalli, the townfolk in his path skipping to the housewalls, doffing their bonnets and muttering the one to the other:

"The Orkneyman is back!"

"I would not be in Hakon's hose!"

"Ho, carls, we shall hear sword music soon!"

"Ingi will find a better taste in his alehorn tonight."

Gutorm the merchant regarded Swain's back very thoughtfully.

"If Swain takes Ingi's plight so seriously," he reflected, "then must it be serious, indeed. I believe this is a time when a wise man walks warily. Yes, yes! He who does not mix in Kings' quarrels has the best chance of growing old and preserving his property."

There were many citizens of Gutorm's frame of mind.

The red-cloaked guards who clustered about the gate of the king's skalli lifted axes in ready salute to Swain and the two scalds. An under-officer stepped forward quickly and conducted them into the courtyard and up to the door which gave upon the hall wherein the king was accustomed to entertain his courtmen.

This under-officer was a Hordadale man named Pal Ragnar's son. He was as glad to see Swain as the merchant had been.

"Ingi will be more pleased to see you than if Gregorius was to bring in Hakon's head," he exclaimed. "*Hutatut*, but fortunes have changed, Swain. When you were here last all Norway crowded the king's hall. Now—" He waved his arm through the doorway.

"Simon Skalp and Haldor Brynjolf's son still serve him," said Swain.

Pal gave Swain a grin of understanding, which became serious.

"That is so," he assented. "But do not underestimate them. Ingi has a secure hold upon them, the best of all holds. If Ingi falls, they die. And well they know it!"

Swain walked on in silence, until Pal put aside the leather curtain that masked the hall door.

"Humph!" he growled then.

The long hall stretched before him almost empty. The afternoon sun streamed through the central smoke hole in the roof, making the interior as light as if torches gleamed in all the brackets on walls and roof pillars. At tables near the door lounged a few guards off duty and a score or so of other attendants, but beyond these men was a waste of deserted tables and benches that continued to the edge of the dais whereon was the king's high table. And at that the king sat with two other men, a meagre figure against the embroidered hangings on the wall behind him.

Swain scowled. He knew the two men who sat on Ingi's either hand. That was Simon Skalp on the right, a tall, bony man, whose face was simply an angular contour, with the skin stretched tight over a prominent skull. The other, a squat, saturnine fellow, very red as to hair, was Haldor Brynjolf's son.

But his scowl disappeared as he sensed the utter loneliness of the king. Ingi was peering straight in front of him as if the sun motes that danced in a broad oblong beneath the smoke vent contained some hidden picture. Simon and Haldor were drinking ale, equally silent. Whatever attempt at conversation had been made had broken down.

"Humph!" growled Swain again.

And he tramped up the length of the hall with a clatter of shield and clank of mail.

The king came out of his absorption with a visible jerk. Simon and Haldor, too, set down their alehorns and stared. But Ingi spoke first. Awkwardly, dragging his lame foot, the hump-backed king pushed back his chair and stood up, face alight—and when Ingi's face lighted up he was as handsome as any man in Norway. In his well modeled features might be traced the pain that he had suffered, the ambitions he had nourished, the undying determination with which he had prosecuted what all men a few years past had dubbed a hopeless thirst for power.

"IN A good hour, Swain!" he cried. "You are come in a good hour. Welcome, my friend. I knew you would not fail me."

Simon and Haldor also started up, and Simon, after a moment's hesitation, left his chair at the king's right hand and stepped behind Ingi to a place next Haldor. Haldor would have echoed the king, but Simon motioned his friend to be silent.

"It is my habit to perform what I promised," said Swain gruffly. "Armod and Oddi brought me your message, and I came. I see that you can not count upon as many supporters as formerly."

The Orkneyman's cold blue eyes stabbed at Simon and Haldor.

"That is so, Swain," admitted the king sorrowfully, a shadow clouding his face again. "We have had naught but trouble since you left us. I thought then that the land would bide at peace, but the people refused to be contented. First, they began to listen to Hakon and Olvir Rosta, and then Erling and Gregorius fell out. And from that moment to this one ill deed has trampled the heels of another."

"But I perceive that certain of your supporters who are acquainted with the meaning of changing sides have remained true," said Swain.

"You were never friendly to us, Swain," spoke up Simon, "but perhaps you will credit me when I say that he who has once gone from one side to the other incurs a double risk of being called traitor if he practices the same thing again."

"I do not doubt it," answered Swain briefly.

"If you undertake to scorn us," barked Haldor, "we might as well——"

But Simon stopped him in the midst of the sentence, and the king intervened.

"Let the past bury the past, Swain. It seems that, aside from you and Gregorius, the only two friends I can rely upon are Simon and Haldor."

"That is well said," applauded Simon.

He turned to Swain again.

"Try our loyalty, Swain," he urged. "That is all we ask. You need have no fear, for we must fight with you whether we will or no. Hakon would use me only for torment in revenge for Eystein's death."

"All our folk are true to Ingi," added Brynjolf. "If you must put it that way, we stand or fall with him."

Swain nodded shortly.

"You speak the truth," he said. "It is well for you that you did. If you had attempted to tell me that you were faithful because you loved Ingi above Hakon or any one else, I should have counseled the king to have your heads hewn off straightway in the yard out there. Men of your sort I trust so far as I must, and only then if your interest binds you to me."

Haldor looked angry, but Simon said:

"You have a rough tongue, Swain. I think you will later adopt a better opinion of us."

"It is for you to convince me that I should," snapped Swain. He climbed up on the dais and took the seat Simon had vacated on the king's right.

"What force have you here?" he asked Simon abruptly.

"We have eight longships on the strand, and the crews to man them."

"And you?" Swain addressed the king.

Ingi waved one hand toward the skalli yard.

"My guards and courtmen, such as they are."

"Where is Gregorius?"

"He is south in Konungahela. Hakon fared Vikenward with the coming of spring, and Gregorius said—as is truth—that we should not let him seize the district, seeing it was Eystein's stronghold, and once he had established himself there he would be the harder to root out."

"What force has Gregorius?"

"He took two longships with him, saying that he could rally enough of the *lendermen* and *boendr*, farmers, and their folk to give him strength to resist Hakon."

A look of uneasiness crept into the king's face as he spoke.

"But from what tidings we have had it does not seem that the Vikenfolk are cordial to Gregorius," he went on. "I was but now talking with Simon and Haldor concerning their faring after Gregorius, in case he requires aid."

Swain reflected a moment.

"He must have aid," he said. "It was my intention to go first to Erling, and talk him out of this pet that he is in. But that must wait. If Gregorius is in Konungahela, and Hakon likewise is in the Viken country they will be sure to come to blows, for I have always felt that the Vikenfolk were lukewarm in loyalty to you. They had too much of Eystein's easy viking rule to care for peace and regular *scat* and taxes."

"Did you bring all your folk?" questioned the king eagerly.

Swain shook his head.

"This is no quarrel to be settled by outlandfolk," he said. "Your enemies will make enough capital out of my presence. If I had a fleet of Orkney craft all Norway would turn upon you."

"True," assented the king.

He leaned his head unhappily on one hand.

"Whatever they do, they turn upon us sooner or later," he sighed. "It is difficult to know how to satisfy them."

"There is no satisfying them," retorted Swain. "Once I thought we might win their regard by saving them from a wholesale folk hewing, but now I wonder whether I was right. The Norsefolk have always been used to warfare, and they are jealous lest a single king shall solidify his power as Harald Haardrada did. But if we keep at them long enough we will hammer them into reason. That is what I propose to do."

"Yes, yes," agreed the king. "That is what we must do. But if you have only your own ship, Swain, what can you do to help Gregorius?"

"Haldor and I will go with him," proffered Simon.

Ingi turned doubtfully to Swain, and was startled as the Orkneyman accepted the offer with entire calmness.

"Yes, I intended to take you and Haldor, Simon," he said. "We could use more ships and men, but we must do what we can with those we have."

He stood up again.

"What?" exclaimed the king. "You will never go so soon! Bide for dinner with me."

There was a pleading note in his voice.

"It is very lonely here in Bergen. When you and Simon and Haldor have gone there will be no folk who can sit at table with me."

Swain growled in the ruddy tangle of his beard.

"That is not right," he said. "The king should be properly served."

And he stood there behind the table, frowning into the shifting sun motes that glimmered across the smutty hearth, pulling at his beard.

"I will leave the scalds with you," he said.

Armod and Oddi both leaped up to expostulate.

"Keep us from the swordplay?" cried Oddi.

"We brought you hither, Swain," remonstrated Armod, almost forgetting his drawl.

"There will be opportunities yet for you, scalds," Swain reassured them grimly. "But if there were to be none still would I leave you here. I rely upon you to entertain the king and assist him in winning recruits to us. See!" He smacked the tabletop with one hand, and the cups and dishes pranced like living things. "Send word to all the skallis within a day's ride of Hardanger Fjord, king. Bid the chief's to a feast. Tell them Swain and Gregorius are harrying Hakon in the south, and that you wish to celebrate our deeds. Tell them that Armod and Oddi are with you—that should be lure enough."

"But will they come?" countered Ingi proudly. "I am not one to bid chiefs to me, and have them refuse twice."

He pointed at the barren skalli.

"Do you think I willed this, Swain?"

"No," answered Swain, "but I was not here until today."

The Orkneyman beckoned to Simon and Haldor.

"Call up your folk from the taverns," he ordered. "We sail with the ebb."

IV

WHEN Swain came to make a close examination of Simon's and Haldor's longships he was somewhat disgruntled to discover them small craft, *snekkes* or *skeids*—longships without figureheads on the prows—none of them pulling over eighteen or twenty oars a side and most of them with crews of from fifty to sixty men. However, a cursory inspection of the crews convinced him that they were good fighting material, all trained housecarls, well armed and armored.

"I should prefer other allies," he grunted to Erik as *Deathbringer* pulled out into the stream and took her place at the head of the little fleet, "but after all, it may be said that Simon and Haldor are warriors who can fight if they must, and their housecarls are veterans who have been in their service for years."

"You have a warrant to ask for much from your allies if you go against a hostile king with five hundred men," rasped Erik, who was like Swain, in that he said what he thought.

"Five hundred?" repeated Swain. "Truth is a weighty word, little man. I count better than six hundred."

"Well, a hundred more or less is nothing to wrangle about," growled Erik. "And I would prefer to see the banners of Gregorius and Erling following us rather than those 'king-sellers'."

Swain grinned.

"If they sold Eystein, nonetheless did Simon have the hardihood to slay him. A man who can slay a king ought to be of some use in a shield-cracking."

But Erik stamped forward, mumbling in his beard.

They sailed southward without any adventures, asking information of all the fishing boats they encountered; but the fisherfolk knew little, and were loath to tell that, not liking to mix in the quarrel between the two kings.

Swain heard vague talk, talk of an army gathering to young Hakon, of a greater army mustering to Ingi—this he knew to be untrue; rumors that Hakon was advancing upon Konungahela, that Gregorius had summoned the Vikenfolk to a Thing, that Olvir Rosta had brewed a spell which would numb the arms of all who struck at Hakon, that Ingi was fleeing to Denmark. And much more.

But a day's sail from Konungahela they sighted two longships pulling north, and as the wind favored him Swain bade his folk run the strangers down. The longships from the south hesitated, seeming to deliberate between heading for the shore and flight; but presently they shifted course altogether and stood on to meet Swain. And when they were within hail Swain was amazed to identify the huge figure of Gregorius standing on the poop of the leader, spear in hand.

Deathbringer steered alongside of Gregorius' ship, and before Swain could speak the lenderman shouted—

"Where is Ingi?"

"In Bergen," replied Swain. "Where did you think him?"

Gregorius made a hopeless gesture.

"There was a report that he had mustered a mighty folkgathering and was coming to aid me. But if he——"

"When I left him he had his guards, and no others, by him."

"That is ill tidings," exclaimed Gregorius. "You must know, Swain, that Hakon is in Konungahela."

"Ho," said Swain. "So he drove you out?"

"No," denied Gregorius. "He did not drive me out. I fled without a fight. What could I do with two hundred men against him? He has four thousand at his back."

"Would not the Vikenfolk aid you?"

"They came to a Thing I summoned, and while I talked they said nothing. And when Hakon marched down from the uplands all the young men flocked to his standard. I might have held Konungahela against him for a time, but I thought my life was worth more to Ingi than a disloyal town."

"You thought right," approved Swain.

Gregorius shook his head dolefully.

'I thought your sails were the scouting *snekkes* of a great fleet, Swain, but with such a following— It is too bad! Who is with you?"

Swain told him, and Gregorius looked more doleful.

"We have had ill luck ever since you fared for Orkney last summer," he complained. "I know not what to do. The king is in an evil plight, and we who have served him faithfully can look for little else than a yard of cold steel in our throats."

Swain nodded to this, glooming over the knot of ships, the oarsmen leaning forward over their ponderous ash shafts, the chiefs and ship captains all striving to catch every word of the dialog which passed between the Orkneyman and Gregorius.

"When I have my back to the bank I fight," said Swain at last.

And he spoke with a new ring in his voice.

Gregorius leaned over his poop rail to hear better.

"Yes? But what then—or now?"

"Our case is so evil that we can do little else except play for a high stake, desperately," rejoined Swain.

"A high stake,'" repeated Gregorius. "What do you mean?"

"I am going on to Konungahela, and try a fall with Hakon," said Swain.

The *lenderman's* jaw gaped. He ran a hasty eye over the array of craft under *Deathbringer's* lee.

"One dragon, two longships," he protested, "and eight small fry. How many men? Perhaps nine hundred—less than a thousand."

"Not a thousand," Swain admitted. "But I would have you remember that our men are all trained housecarls. Hakon's four thousand are country levies, farm lads, outlaws, adventurers. There has been no general rally to him yet. They will not be looking for us. They will be flushed with success, over-confident. Let us once dig spears into them, and we will have a strand-hewing that will be long remembered."

As Swain spoke a fire of daring flashed in Gregorius' eye.

"I might have known you would not be one to accept defeat tamely!" exclaimed the *lenderman*. "Well, I have always been willing to go where you went, and it shall not be said that I refused today. But will those with you keep us company?"

Swain shouted across the gap of water to Simon and Haldor, each of whom stood on the poop of a *snekke* astern of *Deathbringer*.

"Gregorius and I are going south to Konungahela to attack Hakon and Olvir Rosta. We can make use of your swords, but if you are unwilling to accompany us we shall go just the same."

Simon cleared his throat and looked to where Haldor stood; but Haldor would not speak first.

"Why, that is very honorable of you, Swain," said Simon finally. "But I thought I heard Gregorius report that Hakon had four thousand of his folk in the town?"

"He has," said Swain.

"Those are dangerous odds," said Simon.

"What will King Ingi do if harm comes to us?" suggested Haldor.

Swain's teeth glinted white through his beard. His lips curled back wolfishly.

"The odds are dangerous," he agreed. "As for King Ingi, he will be no worse off if we die than if we return to him meekly and report that we suffered Hakon to seize upon Viken and all the southeastern country."

Simon gulped.

"I said that I would fare with you, Swain," he replied; "and fare with you I shall, albeit your venture does not commend itself to me."

"One way or the other, it is death for us," protested Haldor. "For if we do not go

with you we shall probably be slain with the king."

"I consider that your reasoning is correct,' Swain remarked drily. "But you come or stay or do otherwise, according as you will."

"Oh, we shall go with you," said Haldor suddenly. "Well you know we cannot do aught else."

But that night Gregorius came aboard of *Deathbringer* and remonstrated with the Orkneyman for carrying with them such unsteady people as Simon and Haldor.

"My back crawls when it must rely upon a proven traitor to cover it," quoth Gregorius.

"I have no tenderer a stomach than the next man," answered Swain. "But it turns over when I must meet with Simon who slew Eystein, the King who had raised him to wealth, or Haldor, who sold himself from Eystein's service because he knew he could hope for no more wealth from that King. But I have given the matter much thought, and I am sure that we can depend upon their good-faith for the reason that they have no recourse but to stay with us."

"It is so," assented Gregorius. "I have often said as much, myself." Swain stared at him curiously.

"It was concerning this same point that you and Erling fell out," he observed.

"Oh, Erling!" exclaimed Gregorius. "Say nothing of him, Swain. He is an unreasonable fellow. All he thinks of is his son, whom he would make King."

"It does not become you to call Erling unreasonable," rebuked Swain, "when, after quarreling with him over Simon and Haldor and their like, you adopt his same point of view."

"I did not adopt his point of view," denied Gregorius. "It is one thing to say that they should be encouraged to come to court and make sure their allegiance to Ingi, and another to be obliged to rely upon them in a battle against heavy odds. Also, I consider that I was justified in advising Ingi to reward them and receive their friendship, for it appears that they are today almost the only chiefs he can depend upon."

"There is, perhaps, as much to be said upon one side as the other," said Swain. "But this is not the moment to compose your quarrel with Erling. One cow at a time, as the peasant said when he went to the milking."

V

YOUNG King Hakon and his chiefs were holding a Thing with the townfolk and the *boendr* from the Viken country in a field outside Konungahela when a boy ran into the Thing place and shouted that strange longships were in the river. The Thing broke up at once, and Hakon led his followers at a run back to the town.

"It is Gregorius," cried one of the townfolk as they came in sight of the river. "I would know that ship of his in any muster."

"He has more folk with him than when he left here, Lord King," added another townsman.

"Yet he has few enough in comparison with us," answered the young King proudly.

Sigurd of Reyr, who was the greatest of the Norsefolk in Hakon's company, spoke assent.

"Gregorius must be fey to throw himself into our hands with so few men," quoth Sigurd.

But Olvir Rosta, who had been frowning at the strange ships beside them, shook his head.

"Not so, Sigurd," said the Roysterer. "If my eyes are as keen as they used to be, that dragon which rows beside Gregorius's longship is Swain Olaf's son's *Deathbringer*, and "

"What? Swain of the Orkneyar?" exclaimed the king.

"Yes, Lord King, and any man who knows Swain knows that he is a fool who believes Swain to be easily trapped. See! Already they have passed the town and are upstream from us."

"I see not what benefit they have from that," objected Sigurd.

"They will have the current with them if we go to attack them," replied Olvir. "And since we have fewer ships than they we should be foolish to attempt that."

King Hakon and the other chiefs knitted their brows in thought. What Olvir said was true. Their folk had come by land to Konungahela, and the only ships available for their use were such trading vessels as happened to lie off the town.

"Why should we attempt to attack Swain and Gregorius?" said Hakon. "We hold the town. Let them attack us."

Sigurd and Olvir declared that this was good advice.

"Especially," added Sigurd, "as we must outnumber them so heavily that only foolishness would tempt them to come to a shield-cracking with us."

"Humph," growled Olvir, "you little know Swain if you discount him so easily. My counsel is that we should at least man the shipping in the river. We have ample folk to do so, and still hold the approaches to the town."

"I think that is a good idea," said King Hakon. "And since you are the best known seafighter in our host, Olvir, I appoint you to command the ships. Take whatever men you require for the task."

There was a mighty bustling and scurrying in the streets of Konungahela after this, with small boats shoving off from the shore and ferrying men to the ships, and companies running here and there to occupy the entrances to the town.

Olvir found six ships worth using, and these were all larger than any of Swain's and Gregorius' craft, except Swain's *Deathbringer*.

"Ho," said Olvir, "if they come at us we will give them a warm greeting."

But his men did not feel so confident. They were mostly upland levies, who knew little of the sea and of ships, and there were few veterans among them, which was not Olvir's fault, for he had been obliged to take whatever material he could put his hands upon. And as Swain shrewdly had surmised, the weak point in Hakon's array was the untried greenness of the boy king's folk. They were valiant and eager, but for the most part raw farm lads who had never seen a weapon-push.

In the meantime, and while Hakon's chiefs were making their preparations, Swain and Gregorius sent their folk to eat and concerted their own plans.

"We should have seized those vessels as we passed the town," said Gregorius sorrowfully as they watched Olvir's men going aboard the merchant craft.

"No, no," denied Swain. "I left them on purpose. Where are your wits, man? If we can trap so many of Hakon's carls in the river there will be less of them for us to assail ashore."

"We must pay a price to do so," Gregorius reminded the Orkneyman.

"I will buy them cheap, then," retorted Swain grimly. "Now, heed what I say. Get out every bow and spear we possess. *Deathbringer* shall assail that one of Hakon's ships that lies close by the piers, the one with the green prow." As it chanced, this was the ship Olvir was on, but Swain did not know it yet. "The rest of you go by couples against the other five. Sweep them with arrows first, then board. I think you will find them ready to sell cheap. No man likes to fight on a strange deck, and Hakon's folk are mostly uplanders who are poor shipmen."

"It is worth the attempt," agreed Gregorius. "And if Simon and Haldor support us we may not have cause to be ashamed of our deeds."

"If Simon and Haldor do not support us they will have short shrift at my hands," rejoined Swain more grimly than ever.

When Gregorius had passed on Swain's commands to the other ships they drew in their oars, laying them along the rowing benches, and commenced to drift downstream, with only the steering sweeps overside to direct their course. By this device they were enabled to use practically all their men for fighting, and as they came within arrowflight of the shipping off the town they directed upon Olvir's craft such a storm of steel that all the Roysterer's people ducked below the gunwales and lay flat on the decks with shields over them for protection.

Olvir, himself, was not slow to see how the fighting went, and he ran forward and severed the anchor rope of his ship, bidding his steersmen turn her head for the shore, "for this is not our day for a ship-hewing."

Swain had been quick to recognize Olvir's black brush of beard, and the Orkneyman promptly sent his folk to their oars, intent upon overtaking his enemy. *Deathbringer* drove after Olvir so swiftly that her prow lapped the merchantman's stern, and Swain, from his forecastle, was able to exchange spear casts and gibes with Olvir.

"You run, as is your custom, Olvir," he cried.

"I shall not go far, Swain," grinned Olvir. "Do you come ashore after me, and I will be asking you to stand my onset."

"That is to be seen," snapped Swain betwixt clenched teeth.

He and his forecastlemen, under Erik's command, made such a slaughter with their missiles amongst Olvir's rowers that the clumsy merchant craft lost most of her way; but by jockeying the helm, and taking advantage of an eddy in the current, Olvir

contrived to nurse her up to one of the piers which was swarming with Hakon's folk.

The Roysterer's people tumbled ashore in the easiest fashion that came to hand, some of them leaping into the shallow water, others jumping to the pier and risking impalement upon the spearpoints of their friends, who were casting weapons at *Deathbringer*, already commencing to spew men across the deserted deck of Olvir's ship, in order that they might reach the pier and come to handgrips with the town's defenders.

King Hakon and Sigurd of Reyr ran up to this pier with more men, and there was a great shouting and hallooing:

"Stand to it, Hakon's folk!"

"Out swords, carls! We are more than the Orkneymen!"

Olvir, in the front rank of the defenders, was calling upon them to dress shields and close their ranks. Swain and his carls were hewing down at them from the rail of the merchantship, but were too few to venture ashore.

So the fray went for as long as a man requires to don mail, and if Swain was unable to gain the pier, nonetheless were King Hakon's folk hindered by the press of their numbers in the confined area they occupied; several were pushed off into the water and drowned under the weight of their armor. And when matters were in this train Gregorius perceived Swain's plight and abandoned the attack of the craft in the river and rowed with his two long ships for a second pier, the men on which were all intent in watching the struggle between Swain and Hakon. As he withdrew from the river fight Gregorius passed under the stern of Simon's *snekke* and he hailed Simon thus:

"We have drawn the teeth of these upland carls, Simon. Do you and Haldor finish them. I must go to Swain's aid. Come after us when you can."

Simon peered over the gunwale, his bony face very glum.

"It is my counsel that you bide with us, Gregorius," he urged. "Swain and you can not hope to defeat all King Hakon's men."

"Tonight we will decide what has happened," replied Gregorius, "and if fault is found with your share in the venture I think your feet will itch in their shoes."

"Oh, I will do as much as any of you," scowled Simon. "It is a sufficiently difficult task you have set Haldor and me—eight small ships against five lastships and *busses* (large cargo vessels)."

"To it, carl," rasped Gregorius. "Remember, I have stood your friend with King Ingi, and if I am to continue to in the future you must cleave to my back like a *pantzer* coat (scale armor). Run your ships alongside these *busses*, and board. There is no heart left in the uplanders."

Simon's scowl broadened, but when Gregorius looked back a moment later he saw a wave of men flowing over the side of Simon's *snekke* and knew his words had had effect.

"Here is a fight in which we die or we win," he called to his own crew. "It is not often warriors are required to encounter such odds, but I remind you that King Ingi's crown rests upon our efforts today. Keep your hearts unafraid, and strive to be as dauntless as Swain's Orkneymen."

HIS men answered him with a single hoarse cheer, which was echoed aboard the second longship, rowing on Gregorius's larboard quarter, and they crashed together into the crowded pier, the force of their onset carrying away a considerable section of the piling and knocking a score of men into the river. Gregorius's crews were tumbled in heaps in the longships' waists, but they regained their feet, and sprang to the pier, hewing and striking at all who confronted them.

They won a free space immediately, and the men who were meeting them raised a shout for help, which brought reinforcements from the adjoining pier whereon Swain still struggled unsuccessfully for a landing. King Hakon and Sigurd left Olvir to hold Swain, and went with five hundred men to stop Gregorius. By the time they reached the next pier, however, Gregorius had cleared it, and with his men formed in the shield-wedge, was boring steadily into the disorganized mass that resisted him. Hakon and Sigurd were able to stay his progress by dint of numbers, but while they were doing so Swain obtained a footing in spite of Olvir's opposition and exchanged blows with the Roysterer at the pier-head.

Swain wielded his huge sword Hausakliufr, Skullsplitter, and Olvir swung the ax which was his favorite weapon, and the whirlwind onslaughts they launched at one another tore the hostile ranks apart. But

it was not Olvir's way to come to handgrips with Swain, if he could avoid it; he plotted his vengeance in advance and strove to obtain it by devious ways tinged with the dark hue of the magic that had earned his infamous grandmother Frakork the title of Witch.

Brave Olvir was, beyond question; but he preferred to win by treachery, for he considered it witless to expose himself unnecessarily. And so he contrived to lose himself in a group of his men at the first opportunity, ruthlessly sacrificing to Swain's hungry blade a pair of tall farmlads, in order to escape its threatening edge.

Olvir had color of excuse for his flight, for at that moment Simon and Haldor, having cleared two of the merchant ships and driven the remaining three ashore, pushed their eight vessels up to the two wharves that Swain and Gregorius had won, and landed for each of the chiefs a reinforcement which doubled the invaders' strength.

Olvir fled into the town at once. Hakon and Sigurd maintained a broken resistance to Gregorius' attack for a short time longer, then retreated up a convenient street, showing their teeth to the pursuit Gregorius flung after them.

But Swain would not suffer any let-up in the struggle.

"After them, carls," he shouted. "Ho, Gregorius, after them! Let them rally, and they will come at us again. After them, every man!"

He collected their two bands into one array, and with shields dressed and weapons bared marched into the town along the street Hakon had followed. The townsmen and countryfolk, who had been at the Thingstead with Hakon's followers, had all either fled or taken houseroom by now. Of Hakon's uplanders many hundreds had been slain, both in the ship fight in the river and in the frays on the piers; but Hakon still outnumbered the attackers by odds of six to one, and the young king raged like a rutting stag in the shame of the humiliation he had sustained.

"Fight!" he cried, as his folk gathered in the market place. "Fools, knaves, we shall not be able to hold up our heads again in Norway! We must not let one of Swain's carls escape."

"I mean no man to cry 'run' when the fighting is promising," interposed Olvir; "but I remind you, Lord King, that our folk are disordered and harried. Swain's men are all trained warriors, and we——"

"We must fight, whether we will or no," said Sigurd of Reyr. "It is most likely, as you say, Olvir, that we shall only suffer more scathe, but defeat means that what we have accomplished must all be done over again."

"I should not mind if Swain and Gregorius alone had beaten us," exclaimed Hakon. "But I marked Simon Skalp's face and Haldor's banner, too. To have fled before such foul knaves! I can not support it."

"Perhaps we shall yet have more good than harm from what Simon and Haldor have done," remarked Olvir. "If you will fight, Lord King, now is the time to attack Swain, before he wins clear of the narrow streets by the strand."

So Hakon's folk divided into three parties, and descended from the center of the town by separate streets, thinking to come at Swain in the front and on either hand, hemming him in between the houses and so making an end of him. But Swain was wily; he expected such an attack, and he countered it by advancing at a run, so that he was able to throw his whole force against the central column, which was led by King Hakon and defeat it before either Sigurd or Olvir could come to its assistance. For as Olvir—and Swain, himself—had predicted, the trained housecarls of the attackers were able to slash through the disorderly ranks of the uplanders like a good knife through cheese. Hakon's column was torn asunder, and the young king's bodyguard were hard put to it to carry him off safe.

But still he had not had enough of the battle. He rallied his folk on the outskirts of the town, met Olvir, who had brought off his column without a fight as soon as he had perceived what had happened to Hakon's, and persuaded the Roysterer to accompany him back into the streets to extricate Sigurd, who, in an effort to aid the king's retreat, had thrown himself blindly upon Swain.

Sigurd was in desperate case by the time Hakon and Olvir reached him; but Swain, gathering fresh confidence from the ease with which his men outfought the defenders, ventured for the first time to divide his own forces, and while he kept the main mass of the attackers in play he dispatched Gregorius to turn their flank.

The first sight of Gregorius' rusty helms in rear of them drew a howl of fear from the uplanders. They split apart like a rotten hull battered by cross-seas and fled in every direction, carrying their chiefs along with them for all Hakon's best efforts to halt the flight.

That was the end of the struggle for Konungahela. Hakon's folk fled out into the open country, and Swain and Gregorius pursued them as long as their men had strength to follow and slay. But Swain turned aside from the pursuit early in the day, and plucked Erik by the arm.

"Take as many carls as you require, little man," he panted, "and a score or two of townfolk to row you in the fastest of our *snekkes,* and fare for Bergen. Tell Ingi that we have won back the Viken country for him. It is for him to make our victory secure. Bid him muster every man who will come to his banner and march to join us. The time to harry an enemy is while he is fleeing."

"My sword is still thirsty," answered Erik; "but I would forego many things for the privilege of spreading the tidings of this day. We have fought the greatest fight I ever heard tell of in this land or any other."

And indeed, men spoke with bated breath of the exploits Swain and Gregorius had performed in the "fray of the piers," as it was called. For all agreed that no two chiefs had done more with fewer men since the time of Halfdan the Black, for Hakon was a brave king and his chiefs were also brave and wily, into the bargain, nor were his folk niddering; but notwithstanding that they were more than four thousand they had been unable to make any head against Swain and Gregorius, who, the most of the day, never had above four hundred men in the shield-wall with them.

VI

KING INGI mustered a notable array of folk from the neighborhood of Bergen. It was the old story in Norway. When the fighting went against the king no man would lift a spear to aid him. The moment the king's friends scored a success for him the *boendr* and their tenants fell over each other's heels in their anxiety to prove loyalty to him.

Moreover, in the two scalds, Armod and Oddi, the king had allies of unusual capacity for attacking sword-swingers. Many young men made heroes of this pair, and were blithe to serve the king for the privilege of hearing their lays rather than from any desire to advance Ingi's interests.

The tidings Erik fetched from Konungahela were the last straw that tipped the scales in Ingi's favor. Even before that the news that Swain had come from the Orkneys had made several chiefs take horse and ride to the king's skalli, with intent to make safe their places at his court in the event that what did happen should happen. Some of these *lendermen* and *boendr* were with him when Erik arrived, and the half-hearted promises they had been inclined to make became eager engagements to rouse the fjordside for him. Ingi marched east in the midst of a huge bristle of spears.

Swain and Gregorius made the king very welcome, and they attended him as he traversed the Viken country, hunting down chiefs who had been out with Hakon, slaying some and imprisoning and fining others. There was much burning and foraying back and forth, but Hakon was unable to offer any considerable opposition, his men fell away from him week by week, and presently the young king was compelled to flee up to Gautland.

The uplanders were not inclined to be partial to him, after the man-scathe that had befallen them at Konungahela taking, and he soon continued by the upper road to the Throndhjem district, leaving King Ingi undisturbed in Viken.

In Throndhjem the folk at first looked upon Hakon askance, but Olvir went to the king a few days after their arrival and counseled him that he should summon a Thing and put it to the Throndhjem folk in so many words that he was in evil case by reason of the opposition of Simon Skalp and Haldor Brynjolf's son, who, as all men knew, were the murderer and betrayer of King Eystein.

"Also," advised Olvir, "say that Simon and Haldor would be able to do nothing against you if it were not for Swain, who is an outlander; and ask them if it is fitting for the Norsefolk to be compelled to do as an Orkneyman wishes, instead of being left to themselves. Then you may go on and remind them that if Ingi obtains his wish to be king alone over all the land there will be none to check his tyranny. I think that

such talk may lead them to look upon you with favor."

Sigurd of Reyr approved Olvir's advice, and Hakon said that he would accept it. The result was that the Throndhjem folk came to the Thing, lured by curiosity to see Hakon, whose nickname of "Herdabreid" had been fairly earned and who was as manly and handsome as any saga hero. And they were so taken with his youth and gallant demeanor that they readily indorsed his arguments and decided in the Thing that he should be acknowledged king and have the right to demand of Ingi one-third of Norway as heritage from his father Sigurd and his uncle Eystein. Sigurd was named ambassador to wait upon Ingi with a message to this effect, pledging the Throndhjem folk to Hakon's cause if his share of the land was not granted to him.

It was on the verge of winter by now, and Sigurd, traveling with a peace shield and a small escort of servants, found Ingi back in Bergen. Gregorius would have had the king refuse to receive Sigurd, as an open enemy; but Swain advised the contrary.

"He who will not listen to his enemy's peace terms incurs thereby the accusation that he is unreasonable," said the Orkneyman. "Let us hear what Sigurd has to say. We do not need to agree to what he proposes."

"That is only wisdom," assented Ingi. "Ho, carls, bring Sigurd in."

The skalli was thronged with chiefs when the ambassador entered, a very different picture from that which it had presented the day of Swain's arrival a few months past. The king's crimson-cloaked guards stood around the walls and made an aisle up the middle from the entrance to the dais whereon Ingi sat, Swain to right of him, Gregorius to left.

Sigurd stalked up the open way between the ranks of guards with a scornful smile upon his face. He was a large man, and a handsome, with a singularly pleasing, open expression, in every way the opposite of Olvir Rosta, and although every other man in the skalli was his enemy all admired him, even to the king.

"You are a brave man, Sigurd," Ingi greeted him. "I have heard good tales of you. I could wish that you were my man. The king is well served who has you by his side. What message do you bring me?"

"For your kind words I give you thanks, Lord King," replied Sigurd, bowing low. "But I have none to answer them, for my king sends you word by me that he demands of you his inheritance, the which has been approved and indorsed to him by the Throndhjem folk in open Thing."

Ingi frowned.

"And what is his inheritance?"

"One-third of Norway."

Now, there was a murmur in response to this, for it was less than many had expected Hakon to demand, and some chiefs thought it would be best to agree to such moderate terms, including a number who were closest to Ingi. These pressed up to the dais and whispered to him as he sat there, urging their view upon him and upon Gregorius and Swain, who, they knew, must approve whatever policy was adopted.

Gregorius was inclined to side with these men. He nodded in response to their arguments, wagging his head thoughtfully.

"There is much to be said for this view, Lord," he addressed the king. "Moderation is a virtue. By the terms of Sigurd's offer you would still rule two-thirds of the land and might easily curb Hakon——"

"Until the first time the folk became discontented and inclined to turbulence," interrupted Swain harshly. "I am surprized at you, Gregorius! You veer like a weathercock. These terms will afford Hakon an opportunity to recover from the beating we have given him, and fasten his grip on a lusty host of carls. When the right moment comes he will strike out for another third, and after that——"

"But what shall we be doing all the while?" demanded Gregorius.

"What we shall be doing is of no account. We set out to make Norway one kingdom. That is our object. Now you would turn from it."

Ingi, who had said nothing, straightened his humped figure suddenly.

"Swain has put his finger upon our path," said the king curtly. "I set out to be king alone, and while I live I will not turn from that task. Well I know we shall have no lasting peace until it is attained."

"Swain, himself, has not always followed the straight path to reach his end," objected Gregorius.

"True," agreed Swain; "but I can not see that we are in circumstances that would require us to turn from the straight path.

It is Hakon who has been defeated, not us. We have the land at our feet. Another year or two——"

He broke off, and Ingi prompted him.

"Yes, yes, Swain. Another year or two?"

"I was going to say that another year or two would see us at the end of the path."

"We have seen the end of the path before this," interjected Gregorius sourly.

Swain gave him a bleak look.

"We have," assented the Orkneyman. "And if you and Erling had not quarreled we should never have had to retravel the road."

Gregorius was abashed, and slumped back in his seat, waving away the chiefs who would have spoken further to him.

"It was not I who was unreasonable," he muttered. "You should talk to Erling, Swain."

"I shall," said Swain briefly.

He turned to the king.

"Sigurd awaits your answer," he added.

Ingi leaned across the table in front of him, and directed upon the ambassador the full power of eyes that had often burned with the fever of pain and illness, but had never charred dull in admitted defeat.

"My answer to Hakon is no," said the crippled king in a voice that rang through the hall. "But he is a brave youth, and I acquaint him by you that if he will leave the land peacefully and go crusading to Jorsalaheim—Jerusalem—or viking faring, whichever he prefers, I will supply him with gold and sufficient ships. In Norway he may have only such land as will supply him a grave—a foot the wider than ordinary, it may be, as men tell me he is extra broad in the shoulders."

Sigurd smiled bitterly.

"The sword is unsheathed between you two kings," he replied, "and I am content to leave it to the Norsefolk to decide which of you is unreasonable. As to the grave you offer Hakon, perhaps it will be he who digs it, not you."

And Sigurd turned upon his heel and strode from the hall as a bellow of rage swelled from hundreds of throats. But Ingi, himself, stayed it. The king limped to his feet, hand outstretched in restraint.

"A brave man has spoken," said the king. "It is for us to admire him and regret that he is not our friend. Let him go, remembering that he carries a peace shield."

VII

THAT night, as was his custom, King Ingi drank his evening ale in a private chamber off the hall, with Swain and Gregorius for company. For a while none of the three spoke.

"We are gloomy tonight," said the king at last. "What, carls? Is there feeling between two friends as stout as you?"

Swain said nothing, but Gregorius spoke up sullenly.

"I know not if it should be called feeling," said the big *lenderman*. "But I own to resentment that Swain should have endeavored this afternoon to place the blame upon me for Erling's——"

"I did not place the blame upon you for the quarrel," said Swain shortly. "I place it upon you and Erling jointly."

"Then you are as unreasonable as Erling, who——"

Swain interrupted again, coldly impatient.

"A man is as successful as his intelligence permits him to be, Gregorius," snapped the Orkneyman. "Intelligence should tell you that you can not live in Norway at odds with Erling."

"What?" roared Gregorius. "I not live without—" He choked. "By the Mass, you know not what you say! Erling nor——"

"Peace," said Swain. "I know what I speak of. You can not live in Norway without Erling's friendship and support—any more than King Ingi can. Fate, which I do not pretend to understand, has entwined the lives of you three in such a fashion that two of you at least are dependent upon the third."

"What do you mean by that, Swain?" spoke up the king. "'Two of us—dependent upon the third.'"

"Erling has his son," said Swain simply. "That is his great strength. Also, he has his caution. No man will ever entrap Erling into any plight he does not seek. But you, King, are a cripple; you have always that to contend with. And Gregorius here is forever inclined to lose his temper and act impulsively."

"Humph," growled Gregorius. "I see not that Erling can push himself far without our aid."

"Perhaps he can not," admitted Swain. "But he is not intent upon pushing himself far at this time. His son's chance is to

inherit from King Ingi, and that day is not here yet."

"It might be thought," sneered Gregorius, "that you were suggesting Erling was standing aside in hope that his son's chance might come the sooner."

"No, no," exclaimed Ingi.

"I shall suggest that aspect of the matter to Erling when I see him," answered Swain, "if all other arguments fail."

"Ho," exclaimed the king. "So you are going to Erling!"

"Tomorrow," rejoined the Orkneyman. "I said that I would when we were discussing Hakon's offer this afternoon."

"Well, so far as I am concerned," blustered Gregorius, "Erling must not expect to have the ordering of every man's household and friends as well as his own."

Swain's cold blue eyes focussed upon the angry *lenderman's* face with an impact that struck like a physical blow. Gregorius winced, but held himself to meet the stare by a visible effort.

"Are you unwilling that I should tell Erling it is your desire to resume friendship with him, if he will forget the past in harmony with you?" inquired Swain gently.

"I—I——"

"There is as much reason for your misunderstanding as there is for a wrangle of bower-maidens over who lost the thimble," snarled Swain with sudden energy. "Will you imperil Ingi to satisfy idle vanity?"

"It is no vanity," stammered Gregorius. "And it was not I, but Erling——"

"So you have said! Do you think that I shall say nothing to Erling as to his own selfishness? By the old gods, I never saw two men more stubborn! For I say without hesitation, if that will smooth your feelings, he is as foolish as you. With you for friend, no matter what happens to Ingi here, his task to win recognition for his son becomes twice as simple as it would otherwise be. With him for your friend, no man can overthrow you, Gregorius—and the two of you, with me to aid you, can make Ingi secure against Hakon, Sigurd, Olvir and every loose-sheathed, ale-swigging wrangler in the land. Come, open your eyes, carl! Think! One way lies success, power; the other way failure, death."

"For myself, I find it difficult not to agree with Swain," said the king, not unkindly. "And I put it to you, Gregorius, if the greater fault was Erling's in separating from us when we needed him, ought we not to be generous in making it easy for him to return?"

The *lenderman* gulped at his alehorn.

"If Swain will do it, he will do it, whatever we say," he rasped. "And for Swain, I must admit, he is too good a friend for me to stand in his way. Go on, Swain, say what you please to Erling. I'll not own myself wrong and him right, but short of that——"

"I do not intend to make it easier for Erling than for you," said Swain.

VIII

THERE was snow upon the ground when Swain set out upon his journey, and he traveled with only the two scalds for company, leaving Erik in charge of *Deathbringer's* company, who were maintained at the king's expense and furnished with lodgings ashore.

They made swift progress and came to Erling's farm at Studla, in the Etne district, about the middle part of the afternoon as the sun was declining. One of Erling's housecarls, who knew Swain, had sight of them as they emerged from the forest into the stead clearing, and after greeting them hastily, he went on ahead on snowshoes to announce their coming.

When they reached the skalli all the housecarls were out and under arms to receive them, and in the doorway stood Erling, himself, wrapped in a fur cloak, and his wife, the Princess Kristin, holding in her arms the infant Magnus, their son, around whom all Erling's ambitions were centered.

Erling was a very ugly man in his face, albeit with an ugliness which men found attractive, and tall and broad, as became a warrior. He was deliberate in his movements, slow to strike, but when he struck hard to resist. Men who judged him dull were always at fault. And he was like most deliberate men, stubborn when stirred to wrath.

The Princess Kristin was well nigh as tall as he, handsome and thoughtful beyond most women. In fact, the gossip of her was that she had inclined Erling to jealousy of Gregorius; and it was known to all—for she did not try to conceal it—that she egged on Erling to plan for their son's advancement.

"A warm greeting to you, Swain," Erling

hailed the visitors. "I heard that you were in Norway—and that, as always, the ravens attended you."

"There has been some slaying," answered Swain. "And I should have been better pleased had your sword drunken its share of blood."

A bitter look crept into Erling's face.

"You would have been, Swain, but not others. Well, well, come in out of the snow."

He escorted them to the high table, and Kristin handed over her child to the bower-maidens and came to sit with them, ordering the kitchen varlets who fetched in the mulled ale and flagons of mead and huge dishes of sheep bones and roasted pig. But for a while there was no more conversation, for Swain and the scalds were hungry from the cold and their journey.

"Ho," grunted Swain at length. "I am no ale drinker, but on a cold night give me hot ale to heat my blood. Hrr-rr-umph! Enough."

He swung around upon Erling without prelude.

"What is this I hear of a quarrel betwixt you and Gregorius?" he growled.

"Why — why — Gregorius— Those foul carls, Simon and——".

Swain wagged a greasy forefinger under Erling's nose.

"I like Simon and Haldor no more than you, knowing as well as you how and why they came to us. But if you heard aught of what happened at Konungahela this past summer you know that they fought diligently for Ingi; yes, when other and better men would not. And if Gregorius and I gained most of the popular credit for the fray on the piers, I am not such a fool as to suppose we should have succeeded without them."

Erling gaped uncertainly.

"Ha, Swain," said Kristin, "but you have no knowledge of the slights which Gregorius put upon——"

Swain thumped the table until the dishes rang.

"Show me a woman who sits at the high table with chiefs, and I will show you a troublemaker," he snarled. "No, no, be still, the two of you! Kristin, I know you. In your place, you do well enough. You bore Erling a strong son, which was what you should have done, after all. You brought him too, king's blood, a fair name and much wealth. But again, I say, that is no more than he had a right to expect of you. And now, if you think to thrust yourself into his policies, you do yourself harm and him no honor. To the cross-bench with you! That is woman's place."

She eyed him furiously.

"I am a king's daughter," she snapped. "Shall I——"

"You are a good woman, and a wise," admitted Swain. "But I am unable to see how you can assist Erling here. And if you encourage him to oppose Gregorius—just when I have made Gregorius see the advantage of Erling's friendship—you will do your man harm, and not good. So be off to the cross-bench, and let men talk among themselves."

"Yes, yes, Kristin," urged Erling. "You do not show me honor when you make chiefs like Swain believe me to be a man unable to form judgments without a woman's advice."

She rose, towering above them in her wrath.

"Very well," she said angrily. "Let it be so, but I tell you, Erling, if you suffer Gregorius to taunt you and discredit you with the people, letting it be said that Magnus' father was the friend to king-sellers and traitors——"

"If King Ingi is friend to them and I, it is not likely that much harm will be done to Magnus," commented Swain drily. "Moreover, I say to you, frankly, woman—and to you, likewise, Erling—the day is by when you can think to advance your own interests without the help of Ingi and Gregorius. Yes, and my help, too."

"Oh, if you are Gregorius' friend!" snapped Kristin, as she swept from the dais.

Erling shook his head sadly.

"I did not look for you to turn against me, Swain," he said, "nor for you to push the interests of folk like Simon Skalp."

Swain turned in his chair, face to face with Erling.

"Who was it invited me to come to Norway and join in all these kings' wars?" he demanded.

"Why, it was I," owned Erling.

"Yes," agreed Swain. "I remember you asked me to come in Ingi's behalf and because you felt that you could further the interests of your own son best by aiding Ingi."

"That is true," admitted Erling, puzzled.

"And we spoke often together of how we should unite Norway, making it one powerful kingdom, so that in after years when Magnus was grown——"

Erling saw the trend of this and cried out in protest.

"But I never reckoned on Ingi's falling beneath the thumb of Gregorius and dragging me into alliance with traitors and——"

"You talk like a child, or a woman," rebuked Swain sharply. "This is bower logic, not man's talk. Do you want to see Ingi ruined, the land under the sway of Hakon and Olvir Rosta?"

"No, but——"

"Look facts in the eye, Erling. The Throndhjem folk have declared Hakon shall have one third of Norway. Will he rest content with that?"

"No."

"Can Ingi hope to preserve any advantage he wins, if you and Gregorius do not stay friends?"

"No, but let Gregorius——"

"'No,' 'no,'" mocked Swain. "All you can say is no, Erling. Have you 'no' plan to suggest?"

"Let Gregorius admit his fault," said Erling sulkily, "and then——"

"Why should Gregorius admit his fault, when it was yours at least as much as his?"

Erling flushed.

"Take care, Swain. You are my friend, but——"

"You can not threaten me, Erling," said Swain contemptuously. "In a moment, if you are the man I consider you to be, you will ask my pardon for it. Between us the obligation is all on one side."

Erling flushed a deeper red, wriggling uncomfortably in his seat.

"By the blessed Olaf," he groaned, "but you speak the truth, Swain. I pray you badger me no more. My temper is sore tried."

"And mine," answered Swain. "The two of you are at fault today, but I hold that you were first at fault, for no sensible man—you nor any other—can question but that Gregorius did right when he admitted Simon and Haldor to friendship and counseled the king to do so, also. For, when all men abandoned the king, save Gregorius, Simon and Haldor stayed by him. He owes them much, whatever their past."

Swain fell silent, and after an interval Erling turned to the Orkneyman inquiringly.

"Well?"

"I ask you, not as a favor, but as a right—a right due to your own son, as well as to Ingi and to the land—to return with me to Bergen, to handfast Gregorius, the two of you owning together that neither shall nourish resentment against the other, and that you shall at the same time assure Ingi of your aid when he calls out his folk in the spring."

Erling frowned at the hearth fires, with a trace of resentment still clouding his face.

"I'll not be jeered at for caution, when it is I lead the van in the fighting," he rasped.

"I am not one who has to be told of your bravery," retorted Swain. "Nor, for that matter, is Gregorius. We both felt the want of you at Konungahela."

That was a clever stroke of Swain's. Erling flushed again, but not with resentment this time.

"Did you?" he questioned eagerly.

Swain grinned.

"Imagine our plight, old steel eater," gibed the Orkneyman roughly. "Why, it was Gregorius who was afraid Simon and Haldor would not do their part! But if we had had you—as we both agreed—" and Swain never blinked—"we should have slain Hakon and Olvir without trouble."

Erling's hands opened and shut.

"I was loath to miss that fray," he admitted. "But Gregorius——"

Swain dealt him a slap on the back that jarred his teeth.

"Gregorius will be blithe to see you. The night before I left Bergen he and the king agreed with me that we must have you if we were to smash Hakon in the spring."

"Ha, they need me!" exclaimed Erling doubtfully.

"As you need them," countered Swain. "What, think you, would happen to you and your son if Hakon and Olvir won the land?"

"That is so," assented Erling. "Still——"

"Still? Always! Why, carl, you can not succeed unless Ingi succeeds. And both you and Ingi require Gregorius to strengthen you."

Erling bit his lips, almost convinced.

"But I'll not be taunted for caution," he barked, "nor will I take Simon's bloody hand or——"

"No one wishes you to take Simon's hand," returned Swain. "Decently friendly to him you must be, yes. But beyond that

you can consult your own convenience."

The Orkneyman's manner roughened again.

"Come, I'll say no more," he growled. "Come or don't come, as you please. If you don't come, I fare for the Orkneys, and be sure you will never lure me here again. If you come, I'll stand by you."

Erling sprang to his feet.

"I'll come, Swain. For Gregorius I care little, and for Ingi not much more. But well I know I shall need you some day."

"Be sensible, and you can count on me," said Swain. "Remember, it is not an old jerkin we are fighting for, but Norway. What is a man's vanity compared with that? Simon and Haldor are as important in this issue as the fleas on a dog's neck. They may stir the dog to bite—but that is all. And the wise dog never thinks of them."

IX

IN THE morning Erling called up his sister's son, Bjorn Nikolas' son, and two score more sturdy carls, and told Swain he was ready to fare for Bergen. Kristin kept under cover nor did she even appear to bid Swain farewell, and there was bower-talk that she had pleaded with Erling late into the night not to go with Swain or have aught to do with King Ingi and Gregorius. And whether this be true or not, it is certain that she was a woman of strong passions, hot-headed and ever upholding her own will; and she and Erling were estranged for the best part of a year. Indeed, their one bond was their son, Magnus.

Swain and Erling and their company reached Bergen a week or so before Yule, when the *lendermen* and *boendr* were streaming into the town to join in the festivities King Ingi had set forward in celebration of his success against Hakon.

The king's skalli was crowded with famous men and from the instant Swain and Erling passed through the entrance of the hall chiefs pressed forward to greet Erling and welcome him back to court, and this pleased Erling very much, so that by the time he had reached the dais his face was flushed and his eyes were bright, and whatever of sullenness or reluctance had lingered in his heart was washed away.

King Ingi limped up to meet the newcomers, and there was a light of gladness in the king's face that matched Erling's as they clasped hands.

"You are come in a good hour, Erling," said the king simply. "We are about to feast, but if we had not intended to spread the tables I should have bidden the kitchen-folk bring out all they could find to do you honor. You have been absent from me too long."

"That is well said, Lord King," replied Erling. "We have always been friends, you and I, and it is my joy to serve you. I am rejoiced that all has gone successfully with you."

The king's face clouded.

"I have had some good luck, it is true," he acknowledged, "but it has been mingled with ill fortune. My hope is that your coming will insure our future success. I think we shall need every sword."

Gregorius had been sitting by the king, and he rose when Ingi did; but his face was as blank as a wall. The king half turned to him.

"Here is Erling Skakki," said Ingi. "It is a fair day that fetches him to court, eh, Gregorius?"

"I have always been glad to share Erling's friendship," returned Gregorius, "when he would give it to me."

He reached out his hand, and Erling clasped it, albeit not eagerly.

"Friendship for friendship is my way," quoth the Wrynecked gruffly.

Swain scowled impartially at the pair of them.

"You two have had a boys' wrangle," he snarled. "It is ended, do you hear? Ended! Between you, you brought me to Norway and into this struggle for the throne, and now that I am here I propose to see to it that you stand together behind me in what I am obliged to do."

They both grinned sheepishly.

"Whatever was the cause of our quarrel, it is over," said Erling.

"Yes, yes," agreed Gregorius. "Most friends have misunderstandings, Swain. If we had ours that should be an assurance that we will have no more in the future."

He pushed back his chair and made room for Erling in his stead.

"You will have much to say to the king," he added. "I can converse with you later."

Erling thanked him courteously, and took the vacant seat by the king; but as he fell

to talking with Ingi he observed that Gregorius had found another chair at the table which was occupied by Simon Skalp, Haldor Brynjolf's son and their friends, and he frowned at the boisterous cordiality Gregorius showed toward the renegades.

Swain perceived this, and presently the Orkneyman made an excuse to leave the dais and sent a serving-varlet to bid Gregorius to meet him in the skalli yard.

"What foolishness is this?" demanded Swain angrily when Gregorius sauntered out in response to the message.

"Foolishness?" challenged Gregorius.

"Yes, foolishness, carl! By the old gods, when I came hither to Norway this last time Jarl Harald called it folly, and I begin to wonder if he was not right. What hope of success can we have if you will go out of your way to offend Erling?"

Gregorius swelled out his chest.

"I have not offended Erling," he denied. "For the matter of that, it was Erling in the first place who offended me. My friends, and the king's friends, were not good enough for——"

"Bah!" rasped Swain. "I have as much right as you to prate in that vein. If Erling will be childish, need you copy him?"

"I am not childish," fumed Gregorius. "If you think to rebuke me because I spoke with Simon and——"

"Speak with Simon all you choose," said Swain shortly. "Eat with him, drink with him, converse with him, hunt with him—but I tell you plainly you were a fool to go direct from handfasting Erling and openly exhibit familiarity with men Erling calls enemies.

"I say no more, but beware. It is true that I consider Erling's was the principal fault for the original breach between you; but if you continue as you began today you must bear the blame for the second quarrel."

And he turned on his heel and reentered the skalli, refusing to say another word, although Gregorius followed him, arguing vigorously. But his remonstrance bore this fruit: That, while there was no such warm intimacy between Gregorius and Erling as once had existed, they got along together without friction, and Gregorius was at some pains not to flaunt his friendship with Simon and Haldor in Erling's face.

Erling, on his part, treated Gregorius with studied courtesy, and won high favor with the king by his wisdom in counsel and grave moderation. He was popular with all the great men who came to court, but he was scrupulous to avoid contact with the renegades when he could help himself. If he must meet them he showed them a dignified aloofness, which no man might find cause for a quarrel in.

X

IN THE spring King Ingi set up his standard, and many chiefs rallied to his support. There was a rumor that Hakon was heading back for Viken, and Ingi's folk manned their ships and sailed east in order to be ready to defend that country. But as it chanced, Hakon was later *boun*, equipped, than they, and hearing that Ingi's host had fared east, the young king determined to attack Bergen and wrest it from his opponents.

Seven of his longships sailed from Nidaros in the Throndhjem district in advance of the rest, and their crews seized much shipping and ravaged and burned along the shore, with the result that tidings of Hakon's intention reached the Bergenfolk, who dispatched an urgent appeal for aid to Ingi.

Hakon had sailed from Nidaros with thirty ships, and he was at Stiornvelta when the seven ships that had raided south brought him word of Ingi's return to Bergen. He took counsel with Sigurd, Olvir and other chiefs, and they all decided that they lacked the strength to attack Bergen, if the town was held by Ingi's host; but instead of this, Olvir suggested that they make use of Ingi's return to fare on south for Viken.

"While he is waiting for us in Bergen, we can sail around outside the *skerries*, and be in Viken before he knows for certain where we are heading," said the Roysterer.

This plan was adopted, and Hakon's fleet left Nidaros and put out to sea beyond the *skerries*. By accident, however, they met three of Ingi's ships that had been outsailed on the return voyage from Viken, and captured them; but a few of the crews managed to swim ashore, and from these men Ingi heard almost immediately of Hakon's trick, and promptly put to sea, accompanied by Swain, Gregorius, Erling and a huge array of chiefs. He had sixty ships, including numerous dragons.

From fisherfolk Ingi's folk heard that Hakon's fleet had entered the Gaut river, which the isle of Hising divided into two channels. Hakon had sailed up the north channel, and being acquainted likewise by the fisherfolk that Ingi was close behind him, he moored his vessels to stakes in the river in such fashion that the channel was entirely barred and he could be attacked only in front. Moreover, Olvir had seized upon two East-country, Flemish, trading vessels, big *busses*, thrice as high in the side as the longships, and these they moored one at either extremity of their line and erected wooden castles on poop and forecastle of each.

"Now, let Ingi come at us," exulted Olvir. "His numbers shall avail him little."

"But will he surely attack us?" asked Hakon. "It irks me to think that our preparations might come to nothing. For we must show the Norsefolk that we can hold our heads erect under Ingi's steel."

Other chiefs spoke up, and clamored that they should lose no chance to engage Ingi's folk.

"Our honor is at stake," they said. "Ingi will cry that he has been twice to Viken after us."

"Never mind what Ingi says," retorted Sigurd of Reyr. "We who have fought with Ingi's thigh-hewers in the past have sometimes gotten the toothache in our conflicts, and we do not speak too confidently of what is to happen. But nevertheless, I agree with you all and say that if we can come by it without foolhardiness it is necessary for us to fight, for the only escape for us is in victory."

Hakon's men were much heartened by this talk of Sigurd's, and they took oath, every men of them, to stand the brunt of the fight, and earn the "Broadshouldered" his heritage. And afterward they set about strengthening their ships as best they could, taking arrows from the arms chests and placing a good store of stones in the bottoms for hurling at their enemies.

"A stone well flung will do an arrow's work," was a saying of Olvir's.

Ingi's fleet sailed up the Gaut as far as Hising island, and there the ships were beached, and the king called a Thing by trumpet blast to meet on the strand in front of his dragon *Baekisudin*. All the chiefs attended, and when they were seated on the ground the king told them what the spies had reported of the enemy's preparations, and asked their advice as to what should be done.

"They have a very strong position," he said, "but it is clear that we can not leave them to occupy it in peace, and go away. Men would say that we were poor fellows to come so far twice with a mighty armament, and accomplish nothing with it."

There was an interval of silence, and the chiefs in the Thing began to call upon the different leaders to speak. Swain and Erling refused to heed this clamor, but Gregorius rose and gestured for attention.

"I have no doubt in my mind as to what we should do," he said bluntly. "We have a much greater force than Hakon, and you will not have forgotten that the last time we encountered him Swain and I held the short end of the stick. Ever since then we have been saying that if they would await our onset we would teach them another lesson. They appear to be doing as we challenged them to do, and we can not honorably refuse to go against them."

Gregorius's speech won considerable applause, and the king called upon Erling by name, saying that they must hear from more than one man.

"No man in the host has had more experience in fighting battles than Erling, although some might be termed more reckless than he," remarked the king.

"That is so," called a number of men.

And still others cried—

"Let Erling speak!"

"What have you to say, Skakki?"

Gregorius also called out bluffly—

"We do not always agree, but I am the first to admit Erling is a wise counselor."

Erling rose with obvious reluctance, and stood a while, leaning on his spear, as if uncertain how to begin.

"As the king has said," he began finally, "I am inclined to caution, and for that reason, perhaps, I consider it would be foolish to fight under the conditions Hakon has set for us, notwithstanding that we have so many more ships and men. Suppose that we attack them, as has been suggested. We must row up against the river current. In that case, one of the three men on each oar bench must row, a second must cover the rower with his shield, and there will be but one man in three to fight. Of what use to us, then, will be our superiority in

numbers? On the contrary, it will be we who will be outnumbered."

Men nodded their heads as Erling spoke. Some cried assent, and a few shouted objections. Gregorius, alone, made definite comment upon his speech.

"There is much in what you say," admitted Gregorius; "but if you will not have us attack Hakon, what shall we do? Would you have us retreat?"

"I have given no thought to the matter as yet," returned Erling. "Let me think it over for two or three days."

But there were many objections to this proposal.

"And what will Hakon's folk be doing in these three days?" shouted Gregorius to make himself heard in the confusion. "How many fresh allies do you think will flock to them from the disaffected Vikenmen?"

There was a fresh uproar. A dozen men exclaimed that even though Hakon did not receive reinforcements he would be likely to escape them by taking to the land.

"And in that case, all that we have done will have been for nothing."

"You asked for my advice," answered Erling, "and I gave it for what it is worth. Do you deny that in attacking Hakon upstream you will be obliged to employ two thirds of your men to navigate your ships?"

No man could deny this. It was the simple truth, and gradually a glum silence settled down upon the Thing, a silence that was like a thick and clammy fog curtain, stifling, blinding.

King Ingi gnawed at his mustaches, and peered from one side of him to the other. Already his chiefs were drawing apart into two separate groups, those who sided with Erling and those who agreed with Gregorius, and men were whispering apart, Erling's friends saying that it was always so in any difficult issue: Gregorius would be for a folk-hewing that would wreck the land; while Gregorius' partisans muttered that what Erling sought was to make sure that Gregorius should not have the credit for whatever was done.

Behind the king sat Swain, who had been silent throughout the debate, and at this stage Ingi turned to him.

"Here we are in treacherous waters, Swain," said the king. "Can not you point us a safe course?"

"I had thought not to speak out too prominently in your Things," rejoined Swain unwillingly. "I am weary of being pointed to as the outlander who dictates what shall be done."

The king smiled sadly.

"God knows, I sympathize with you, Swain, I, who am often pointed to as the king who never gets things done, albeit my life is one continuous struggle to achieve. But there comes a point beyond which a man can not indulge his own feelings."

"True talk," admitted Swain.

"Let us hear your thoughts, then. Who is in the right, Erling or Gregorius?"

The chiefs close by the king clustered nearer, and the remainder in the circle, seeing that Swain was about to speak came after them.

"Why, they are both right," answered Swain; "and as is often the case, both wrong, as well."

"How so?" demanded Ingi.

"It is true that you must attack Hakon, and that speedily. It is also true that you will incur defeat if you row upstream against him in his present situation."

The king shook his head, puzzled.

"You talk like a rune-riddle, Swain. Be plain."

"To be plain," replied Swain, "you must meet a trick with a trick. Hakon and his chiefs have so contrived that you will invite defeat if you row up against them. But in order to find a part of the river narrow enough for them to span it with their ships they have been obliged to select a spot which will make it easy for us to discount all their preparations.

"They lie at the head of the north channel, by the upper end of Hising. Let us send out *snekkes*, *skeids*, all our small craft, back downstream and around the lower end of Hising and so up the east channel, and they will be able to come downstream, with the current behind them, in Hakon's rear and if they make a good fight should be able to cut loose his ships from the piles to which he has moored them. While they are doing so the rest of us, with the dragons and long ships, can row upstream and engage Hakon's folk in front. It will go hard with us if we do not catch him between the upper millstone and the lower and grind him to a pulp."

The king beamed with satisfaction.

"Excellent," he exclaimed. "I knew you would think of a plan, Swain. What do you say, Gregorius?"

"I am glad there are some of us who are not inclined to put off the fighting until the morrow," growled Gregorius.

"Humph," said Ingi, coughing. "It is in my mind that you underrate our folk. Well, Erling, are you content with Swain's suggestion?"

"I am full content," replied Erling. "And now let all men watch to see if those who are hottest for the fray are brisker in attack than I am."

XI

HAKON'S folk had watchmen posted on a hill overlooking the lower end of Hising; they could not see the cove in the island's shore in which Ingi's ships lay, but they had a clear view of the river channel below it. And when they saw the smaller vessels sailing down the river they decided that Ingi must be in flight, and they ran as fast as they could to Hakon, crying their tidings.

"If Ingi flees we are victors without striking a blow," said Olvir Rosta. "This has been a cheap battle."

"If Ingi flees we should be niddering not to follow him," exclaimed Hakon.

"Why risk men when there is no need?" responded Olvir. "All the Norsefolk will mock Ingi for this deed."

"Not so," objected Sigurd of Reyr. "The king has the right of it, Olvir. We should not merit our fortune if we did not take this opportunity to harrass Ingi's ships. It will do us no harm to capture a few and slay men who are hungry to slay us."

There were many great people with Hakon—Nikolas Skialdvar's son, Eindride, the son of Jon Mornef, who was the most popular man in the Throndhjem district, Ivar, son of Hakon Mage, all the *lendermen* and chiefs who had clung to King Eystein's cause or who had served King Sigurd or who nourished grudges against Ingi and his chiefs; and one and all, they shouted assent with Sigurd's demand.

Olvir shrugged his shoulders.

"It is to be seen that I am in the minority here," he said. "Nevertheless, I believe it to be possible for us to over-reach our good luck. It is not like Ingi or the leaders who follow his banner to run without attempting an attack, and perhaps they have some trick in store for us."

"If any man but you, Olvir, spoke thus, we should suspect his courage," retorted the young king. "I do not see what trick fleeing folk can work against wily pursuers."

"Ha, Broadshoulders, that is the point," answered Olvir. "If it is a trick, it will be unexpected. But talking will not help us now. You are all intent to take oars and be off, and I shall not be behind you in the fray."

So Hakon's folk cut loose from their mooring stakes, taking the two East Country ships in tow, and headed down river, with the current aiding them. And the first that Ingi's fleet knew of their coming was when the crews of the dragons and longships lying under Hising saw the van of the attackers rounding a *ness*, cape, that projected from the island's shore.

Both fleets were astonished by the unexpectedness of the encounter. Hakon's folk, of course, had not thought to meet any ships behind the *ness*, and to their eyes it seemed that all Ingi's fleet was present, for in dragons and longships alone Ingi outnumbered Hakon. On the other hand, Ingi and his chiefs had supposed Hakon's folk were awaiting their attack up the river. But the confusion did not last long on either side.

Olvir Rosta steered his ship abeam of Hakon's, a wolfish grin on his black-bearded face.

"What said I, King?" he jeered. "Now we must fight or die, and he who lives to see the sunset will be able to count himself favored."

Hakon answered him, undaunted.

"I would rather fight, and lose, than run without fighting," cried the king. "Let us attack them before they pull up their anchors."

"No, no," protested Olvir. "They are too many for that plan. Be advised, Broadshoulders, and run into that bight opposite them on the north bank. There is a position as good as that we abandoned. We can run our lines ashore, and the banks will cover us at either end."

Sigurd rowed up at this instant, and he gave his support to Olvir's suggestion. So, while Ingi's ships were getting under way and embarking such of their companies as remained ashore, Hakon diverted his craft into the cove Olvir had indicated, and there his people made their final preparations for the battle, carrying ropes ashore over the stern of each ship and making them fast to

trees on the bank, and binding the forecastle of each ship to its neighbors.

When they had finished the longships lay in a single rank across the cove, with their bows pointed out, King Hakon's ship in the center, Olvir's on one side of him, and Sigurd's on the other, the two East Country ships at the extremities of the rank. And the great advantage of this was that they could be attacked only in the front, and therefore they could concentrate their crews on the forecastles, thus overcoming Ingi's superiority in numbers.

"If we must fight," quoth Olvir with satisfaction, "we could not be better placed."

"We have much in our favor," agreed Sigurd of Reyr. "Let every man watch over his own and his comrades' safety, and God will protect us."

Olvir grinned evilly. He was standing with Sigurd and the king on the forecastle of Hakon's ship.

"As to God, I am not so sure," he said. I am not disposed to trust in Him, but in my own sword. But if we fight hardily we may well get the better of Ingi, and in that case I propose to take Swain for my share of the spoils. I have always wished to see how he would support the torture."

Hakon frowned.

"Swain is a brave carl," he declared. "I could wish he was disposed to fight for my hand. You will do well to bide the battle's brunt before you talk of spoils, Olvir."

When all of Ingi's crews were aboard the crippled king hailed Swain and Gregorius and Erling, and they three had their ships steered prow to prow, starwise, with the king's, and then went up into the forecastles and so held speech together.

"I have no doubt that we should fight," said Ingi, "and I am sending a messenger to recall the light craft that have gone up the east arm; but what is your judgment of the method of attack we should employ?"

"We must seek to hew their ships apart," growled Swain. "If I can get sufficient men upon any deck over there I will soon make an end of them."

"Well said," applauded Erling.

"Push shields with a vim, and we will have Hakon's carls in the mud," assented Gregorius.

"That is my thought," exclaimed the king, "and I shall bid my folk row at once against Hakon's banner."

"No, no," protested Gregorius. "We can not afford to risk you, Lord King. We have ample men for this task, if it is possible of accomplishment. But if we lose you we are undone."

"You are," returned Ingi, with a twinkle in his eye, "but it might be the making of Erling."

"There are two ways to look at that," said Erling, smiling in his turn. "I am not inclined to wish for your death, Lord King. My counsel is that you heed Gregorius."

"Well, that is not the counsel I sought of you," replied Ingi stubbornly "and I shall not accept it. Hakon's banner is in his fighting line, and mine shall be——"

"You speak like a child, king," rasped Swain. "How can we fight for you if we must think continually of your safety? No man knows where an arrow may strike, even though it be shot by a poor archer."

More was said on both sides, but the result was that King Ingi reluctantly consented to remain in his ship in the anchorage.

"But if there seems to be need of me I shall not lurk under cover," he warned the chiefs with a note of defiance.

"None of us would give cause to the people to term you niddering, King," answered Swain more kindly than his wont.

And now all was ready, and Ingi's folk raised a loud shout, and the rowers bent to the oars and urged the ships across the river, and the housecarls on poop and forecastle clattered swords and spear butts on shields, and the archers drew their bows and shafts commenced to hiss through the air. Hakon's folk replied with equal vehemence, and their archers, too, loosed as rapidly as they could pull the bow strings. The spearmen began to cast their weapons, and other men caught up stones from the ballast under the rowing-benches and hurled these missiles across the narrowing gap betwixt the fleets.

The noise became deafening. Rattle of oar-helves, splashing of water, clatter of weapons, shouts of warriors, death cries, shrieks of wounded men—and underneath every sound the deadly, prolonged *hiss-ss* of the arrows, the *ss-sswhiss-ssh* of spears and the thudding of stones.

Swain drove *Deathbringer* in between Hakon's ship and Olvir's; Erling steered in on the starboard side of Hakon, between the king and Sigurd. And ignoring the efforts of Sigurd and Olvir, they sent so terrible a

storm of missiles into the ranks of Hakon's crew that his banner bearer and two-thirds of the shieldmen around him were slain, and the king's marshal, Andreas Simon's son, was compelled to lead him into Sigurd's ship.

Of course, Swain and Erling sustained a sore scathe in men the while they were confining their onslought to Hakon, but the moment they had cleared his forecastle they boarded it from both sides, and fighting aft through the waist soon emptied his ship of defenders.

Others of Ingi's chiefs ran up in their wakes and discharged reinforcements to make good the slaughter Sigurd and Olvir had wrought, and with replenished crews Erling turned upon Sigurd and Swain upon Olvir, fighting shield to shield across their gunwales.

Here all went well for Ingi; Sigurd, fearing for Hakon, was constrained to abandon his ship, and retire to Eindride's, and after a little while, so desperate was Erling's assault, Sigurd and Eindride made the king retire again and this time to the East Country *buss* at that end of their line, where he would be safer from a chance blow.

Swain, likewise, was gradually smashing Olvir's crew to pieces, although the Roysterer, unhampered by any concern such as Sigurd entertained for their king's well being, fought with the cool determination which his bitterest enemies conceded to him. He was never still in one place. Up and down the deck he ran from poop to forecastle, hewing into Swain's folk wherever the pressure was heaviest, cheering his own people, now swinging his ax, now casting spears as fast as they were handed to him, now hurling stones with a vigor that dented helms and knocked men headlong overboard.

But Swain he would not face. Twice the Orkneyman sheared a bloody path to where Olvir pecked across the gunwale, his ax blade spattered with brains and clips of hair—and twice Olvir backed away, with a mocking laugh for Swain's demands that they should crack steel.

"When we crack steel it will not be at your convenience, Swain," he called the second time.

And strive as he might, Swain could not come at him, albeit ell by ell he pressed back the Roysterer's crew, won a footing on their deck and at length forced them to the next longship in the defenders' array.

But elsewhere matters went ill for Ingi. As the attacking ships rowed across the river the current swung them to and fro, and several, including Gregorius', ran aground close under the line of Hakon's craft, and perceiving this, Ivar, Hakon Mage's son, with others of Hakon's chiefs, slacked their moorings and worked down upon the disabled ships, hedging them all around and sweeping their decks with the arrow hail.

Ivar was a very brave man, and a notable warrior; and not content with long range fighting, he laid his ship by the board with Gregorius', so that the crews came to blows hand to-hand, in the midst of which he saw Gregorius leaning across the locked gunwales exchanging sword strokes with several assailants. Ivar caught up a boat hook, reached out with it and fastened it into the links of Gregorius' mail, and then began to drag him overside. Gregorius cursed in amazement at such an attack, lifted his sword and struck down at the boat hook, slicing through the wooden shaft just under the iron of the head.

"You have a thick bark, Gregorius," Ivar hailed him.

"I shall need all its thickness, and not have too much, if you are to attack me thus," replied Gregorius, laughing.

But indeed, Gregorius was in a sorry plight, with half his men slain and foes pouring into his ship from every quarter. He and those of his folk still alive retreated to the stern, and were about to leap overboard from the poop when Ingi rowed up and rescued them, Aslak Unge, The Younger, who was the king's ship captain, throwing an anchor over their gunwale and drawing them off the shoal under the fire of Ivar's ships. This was the entry of Ingi into the fight, and it happened because he had seen how badly Gregorius was faring.

"Look! Look!" he had exclaimed when Gregorius was assailed. "It ill becomes me to stand here out of harm's way, and watch the slaying of Gregorius, to whom I owe my throne."

"Swain will be wroth if you are hurt, Lord," answered Aslak doubtfully, himself anxious to share in the battle.

"Swain did not foresee how matters would go," returned the king. "The current has put so many of our ships out of the fighting that those who have crossed the river are

over born. Come, out oars, carls, and do your part!"

"But Swain—" began Aslak.

"I owe much to Swain," the king cut him short, "but I do not owe him so deeply that I must sacrifice my honor for him. Also, if I lose the men who are the strongest defenders of the kingdom, my most loyal friends, it will serve me poorly to win the battle. Out oars!"

Ingi's crew cheered lustily at his words, and they responded gladly to his urgings to go to Gregorius' assistance. When they had succeeded in hauling Gregorius out of danger the *lenderman* mounted his gunwale and hailed the king, bidding him retreat again to the far side of the river.

"We shall be able to handle these carls, now," said Gregorius. "Our ships that went aground are working off, and on the larboard wing Swain and Erling are carrying all before them."

"The more reason why I should aid in what is to do on this wing," retorted Ingi.

Nor would he be dissuaded from his purpose, and when Gregorius steered in front of him to prevent his attacking Ivar, Ingi ordered Aslak Unge to steer to starboard and lay *Baekisudin* next to the big *buss* at that end of Hakon's line.

"Nobody has yet attacked that vessel," he said, "and it seems that our people lie so thickly in front of us elsewhere that we can come at our enemies only by crawling over our friends' backs."

But the crew of the *buss* assailed *Baekisudin* so hotly with spears, arrows, sharpened stakes and stones, and the sides of their vessel were so high and steep, that Aslak persuaded the king to allow him to find another ship to go against; and as Gregorius breached Hakon's line at that moment, taking Ivar's ship and two more, there did not lack for openings for the king to attempt.

He rowed along the line toward the center, and ranged himself across the prow of Eindride Jon's son's ship, and despite his own lameness, he insisted upon leading the boarders who leaped from *Baekisudin's* gunwale. But before he succeeded in this attempt Eindride came to him, and begged quarter, which Ingi would have granted, but that in the confusion Havard Klining's son ran across the deck and slew Eindride, who had slain his father.

This was the turning point of the battle all along the line. Gregorius had swept the larboard longships and was attacking the *buss* which had repelled King Ingi; its crew now thought mainly of escape, and those who could leaped ashore and fled. In the center Olvir Rosta rallied some five hundred men from different ships, and regained the river-bank, where he formed his company in a shieldwall, and offered a stout resistance to those who would have harried him. Under his protection other bands of fugitives reached the bank and assumed some order of defense. But the last struggle was for possession of the *buss* on the starboard end of the line.

To it had fled King Hakon, with Sigurd of Reyr and a mighty company, and Hakon, who was beside himself with grief, commanded that his banner should be raised on its poop.

"And we shall see if, after all, I must lose this day," he cried, white-faced in his anger.

"It is madness to risk your life, Lord King," pleaded Sigurd. "We have done all that men may."

"No, we shall do more than common men," said the king.

There was still fighting going on at other points. Gregorius was occupied with the other *buss;* Ingi was hammering at the crumbling resistance offered by several crews in the center; and upward of a thousand of Ingi's folk had landed and were aimlessly attacking Olvir on the bank.

Swain and Erling had to carry Hakon's *buss* with the men they had by them, and it was no easy task, for, as has been said, these *busses* were extraordinarily high-sided, and moreover, this one was provided with a belt of toothed iron, a comb, that projected from its gunwale and made the climbing of the bulwarks so much more difficult.

After several failures, Swain decided that he would attempt to scale the *buss's* poop and that in the midst of his attack Erling should try to force an entry into the waist.

"If one or other of us does not succeed we will go back to Bergen and card wool for the bowerfolk," he grunted, lifting his shield mechanically to stop a spear that was cast down at him.

Swain went up to the poop, and gathered all who were living of *Deathbringer's* crew; Erik was with him, and the two scalds, Armod and Oddi.

"I say nothing against what you have

already done," he told them; "but you must decide for yourselves whether old viking farers such as we are can afford to be beaten off by raw landrobbers under a king who is no more than a colt."

"Hakon shall not have much to boast of when the Orkneymen have finished with him, Swain," answered Erik.

"If we say little," exclaimed Oddi, "it is because we have out our swords, not our tongues."

Armod's answer was to spring up from the deck and catch hold of one of the teeth of the comb.

"Well done, scald," cried Swain.

And he placed Armod's feet securely on the rusty links of mail that covered his shoulders, then gripped the scald's ankles with his two hands and tossed him over the comb and the buss's gunwale full into the midst of Hakon's people.

"Who goes next?" shouted Swain.

"I," called Oddi. "Armod and I go together."

"Up with you, little man," rumbled Swain.

But when Oddi would have climbed to his shoulders he picked him up by the belt and slung him bodily through the air, and Oddi found a bed on the heads of Hakon's carls, one of whom he slew as he jumped to his feet and slashed a path to Armod's side.

Erik followed Oddi, and on the heels of the Icelander Swain, himself, scrambled to the *buss's* deck from the shoulders of three men who braced arms to make a platform from which their chief might leap upward and swing over the projecting teeth of the comb.

Hakon's housecarls yielded ground at the first sight of the Orkneyman's ruddy beard and terrible, cold blue eyes and the dripping blade of Hausakliufr circling above his head. It was bad enough, they felt, when three warriors like the scalds and Erik tumbled headlong aboard, slaying and maiming before they had gained a footing; but Swain's name was famous in every skalli and stead of the North—Kingsbane, men called him in Norway in memory of his slaying of King Sigurd; it was reputed death to face him.

One enemy only had fought him and lived, and that enemy was Olvir Rosta, who, men said, was leagued with the Dark Powers of the old gods—and Olvir lived in spite of Swain by dint of constantly fleeing the Orkneyman's wrath. From the *buss's* poop Hakon's wavering folk might look to the shore where Olvir even now was in retreat before the waxing pressure of the enemies who continued to land from the victorious fleet. What could they do if Olvir fled?

"Swain comes," rose the wail. "Back, carls, back!"

"Ware the Orkneyman!"

"Kingsbane has won the deck!"

The poop was cleared in an instant. Forward in the waist a knot of Erling's men gained the gunwale under the break of the forecastle. Erling was clambering from a stack of rowing benches and arms' chests into the bows of the *buss*.

Sigurd of Reyr, who had been covering Hakon with his shield during the retreat from the poop, flung the shield to the deck and dragged the young king by main strength to the shoreward gunwale.

"Now we have come to the end," shouted Sigurd. "Jump, King, and pray to the blessed Olaf you may have better luck than he had at Stiklestad."

Hakon would have resisted him, and fought on, albeit their folk were taking to the water by scores and the shoals were dotted with helms of men swimming—yes, and sinking.

"No, no," barked the king, struggling to free himself of Sigurd's grip. Honor requires me to perish rather than admit defeat again."

Honor requires you to maintain your crown," replied Sigurd sternly. "If we flee today that is not a reason against the coming of a day we shall pursue our enemies."

Sigurd summoned two of his housecarls to aid him, and the three compelled Hakon to jump overside with them, and thereafterward assisted him to keep afloat until they reached the shore at a place upstream from where Olvir was beating off the attacks of those of Ingi's crews who had landed.

While the young king was yet in the water, one of the *buss's* crew cried for quarter and offered to show Swain's folk where Hakon swam. The man he yielded to set up a cry for a bow that Hakon might be slain, and Swain heard it, and came to the gunwale. But the Orkneyman stayed the archer who was about to loose.

"Yes, that is Hakon," quoth Swain. "I know the set of those shoulders even in the water. But we will let him go. The lad made a good fight."

"He is Ingi's enemy, Swain," objected the man who had secured the information. "While he lives none of us is safe."

"That is probably true," agreed Swain. "But I have had a hand in the slaying of two kings, and I am not of a mind to let a third be slain through the treachery of his own folk. There is still a bad smell in the land because of the way Eystein died."

And when Erling came up and expostulated likewise Swain said:

"If it is possible to slay Hakon after he has gained the shore let it be done, but he merits an honorable death for the way in which he bore himself in this fight."

So Erling and the rest of the host went ashore, and harried the fugitives in company with Gregorius. They slew as many more of the common folk as had died on the ships, but Hakon and his chiefs had horses in waiting at the farm of Eyvind Skopta's son and they escaped into the uplands and fared thence northward to Throndhjem.

Ingi and all those who had sided with him earned much honor from this battle in the Gaut river, and indeed, when the scalds came to sing of it there were no two of them in agreement as to which chief had comported himself most honorably or performed the greatest exploits. Finally it was said that all had done everything which could be expected of them, but that the king had done even more than was required, seeing that he was crippled and not generally accounted to be capable of maintaining himself with warriors in the fray. And Ingi, who had been all but disowned by the people before Swain came back from the Orkneys, was now regarded as safe upon his throne.

Scores of chiefs flocked to Viken to pay tribute to him, and listen to the lays the scalds sang of the battle. It was at this time that Armod composed his "River Song":

Men fall upon the slippery deck,
Men roll off from the blood-drenched wreck;
Dead bodies float down with the stream,
And from the shore witch-ravens scream.
The cold blue river now runs red
With the warm blood of warriors shed,
And stains the waves in Karmt Sound
With the last drops of the death wound.
All down the stream, with unmanned prow,
Floats many an empty longship now.
Ship after ship, shout after shout,
Tell that King Hakon can't hold out.
The archers ply their bows of elm,
The red swords flash o'er broken helm;
King Hakon's men flee to the strand,
Out of their ships, up through the land.

For a few weeks many folk even declared there would be no more fighting for years to come.

XII

HAKON and his chiefs fled north to the Throndhjem dales, and with them went all the common folk who escaped Ingi's pursuit, as well as many others from the Vikenside who feared reprisals from the crippled king for their failure to support him in arms against Broadshoulders; and the consequence was that although Ingi's folk had achieved a bloody slaughter in the River Fight Hakon was able to rally as strong a muster of spears in the north as he had led before he fared for Viken.

But neither party was over anxious for a second meeting at that time. Ingi said that he intended, first of all, to root out the disaffected in Viken and bind the country to him so fast that it might not again be induced to favor Hakon's cause.

"In the spring we will go up to Throndhjem and make an end of the boy, one way or the other," he added.

Swain and the other chiefs agreed with him in this view because they knew that Hakon would not stand to await their attack, but would flee into the uplands where the trackless forests provided hiding places for countless outlaws, who would cheerfully take the young king's part, while Ingi temporarily lacked the number of men essential to the task of combing so difficult a country. For, as had always happened in these kings' wars in Norway, the *boendr* and their housecarls and the town levies insisted that they must return to their homes as soon as they had won a victory.

"We have performed our service," they would cry. "Let the king and his courtmen do what little remains to be done."

And off they went to reap the harvest, to spread their nets and to take up the trading ventures committed to their wives or their younger sons, leaving the king with his paid housecarls and the companies attending the great chiefs who were always by him. By harvest time Ingi had no more folk in his train in Viken than actually attended Hakon north in Throndhjem. He had won a hard battle, but he was as far from being unchallenged King of Norway as he had ever been since Hakon's pretensions were established.

"It is not to be denied that we have had good luck," growled Swain, "but we might have had better."

"Hakon will never dare to crack shields with us again," replied Gregorius.

"Be not too sure," quoth Swain. "He is no coward, that boy."

"But if we cling together he will be helpless, Swain," remonstrated Ingi.

"Oh, yes, if we cling together," assented Swain, with a hint of savage raillery in his voice.

"It will not be my fault if we do not present an unbroken front," spoke up Erling.

Gregorius frowned.

"Nor will it be mine," he snapped.

King Ingi sighed wearily. This was not like the old days when Gregorius and Erling had been inseparable comrades, always to be relied upon in any trouble that occurred. It was true that they were scrupulously courteous with one another—but it was not the courtesy of friendship, and beneath tempered words and restrained gestures lurked the sharp sword of suspicion.

Left to themselves, the two chiefs might have discovered again the old ties that had united them, but this their friends and followers would not suffer to happen. There were always men at hand to whisper in the ear of each dark hints of plottings and animosities. The dissension between them which had preceded the River Fight had born evil fruit.

"This is not good talk," said the king.

"It is foolish talk," rasped Swain. "The man who makes trouble among us will be *my* enemy."

Yet he came to the king later after Gregorius and Erling had departed to rejoin their own folk, and broached the topic of discord anew.

"Concerning our two friends—who are not friends," he began abruptly. "I am uneasy, King."

"Uneasy am I, too," said Ingi. "But what——"

"For themselves I am not worried," Swain went on as if the king had not spoken "but what *their* friends will prod them to do, that is a different matter!"

"We can not send away the trouble makers," answered the king. "We have few enough folk as it is."

"For every man in their two companies we have a use," acknowledged Swain. "No, King, we must keep the two out of each other's reach."

"How?" queried Ingi puzzled.

"Thus. Do you bide the winter in Viken, with Gregorius to aid you, while Erling and I will fare for Bergen. It is right that you should have friends in the merchant town to uphold your interests, and labor amongst the fjordfolk to secure fresh allies for the weapon-work in the spring. Erling and I will have plenty to occupy us and keep his friends from mischief. At the same time, you should be able to keep Gregorius' men from idling and scheming to bring about trouble with Erling.

"We will turn their sullenness to good account, in spite of them. When the ice goes out you and Gregorius can come north, and then we will concert measures to bring Hakon to an accounting."

"It is a good plan," said the king, doubtfully; "but what will they do when we all come together in the spring?"

Swain shrugged his shoulders.

"Let the future care for itself. We will cross that ford when we reach it. But this I know: During the winter, if we do not separate them, Erling and Gregorius will come to an open breach—and that will undo whatever good we have accomplished."

Ingi nodded.

"What you say is reasonable, Swain. And surely, we can do no more than keep them apart. If they will persist in quarreling then, why, it will not be we who shall have cause to accuse ourselves of dishonorable or foolish conduct."

"That is my hope," replied Swain. "But he is a wiser man than I pretend to be who can predict what will befall from men's hatreds and jealousies."

XIII

THAT was a red winter, what with the continued outfalls and forays and burnings of skallis and slayings of wayfarers, and it is to be said that Hakon's men were more often than not the aggressors, for he had in his company so many landless folk and outlaws that Olvir Rosta was always able to find a troop of carls in favor of the kind of sport that best appealed to the Roysterer.

Away south in Viken, King Ingi and Gregorius had little to do, save collect fines and hunt down men they had outlawed,

who stole home for very loneliness and the hunger for a wife's arms or to see a newborn son.

But a different tale is to be told of how Swain and Erling spent their days. They did not rest even at Yuletide, and week after week they were ahorse or on snowshoes with their housecarls, driving off raiders, punishing a man of Hakon's for some proven crime or tracking one of the bands of outlaws that Olvir hurled continuously against the settled folk of the land.

They had a fair measure of success, notwithstanding that Swain would not permit their company to venture too far abroad.

"Hakon is stronger than we," he would say. "Also, Erling, have it in mind that it is good for Ingi's cause to let the Norsefolk sample in advance what they might expect from Hakon and Olvir, if——"

"That is unthinkable," retorted Erling. "But I must admit there is justice in your words."

He sang a different tune a week afterward when travelers from the south fetched word that Gregorius had proclaimed in open court that if he was so near to Hakon as Erling was he would not sit quietly by a skalli hearth in Bergen the while Hakon's folk slew King Ingi's friends.

"By——!" he swore. "This passes bearing, Swain. Gregorius takes too much upon himself."

Swain's face was as hard as a rock.

"If Gregorius reflects upon you," replied the Orkneyman, "he likewise reflects upon me. Ho, Oddi!"

And when the little scald came to him he continued:

"Get you south to Viken, carl. Seek out Gregorius, and give him this message from me—give it to him in the king's presence.

" 'Swain greets you by me, Gregorius, and would know if men say with reason that you have reflected upon his courage and loyalty.'

"And if he denies it repeat to him what has been reported to Erling. If he would then excuse himself by claiming that he had no thought of me, tell him that it is I, not Erling, who am responsible for the losses our folk have suffered in the north. That is all."

Oddi grinned.

"There can be but one answer to that message, Swain."

"Whatever the answer, I will have it," said Swain.

But Erling frowned, dissatisfied.

"If Gregorius disowns what he said, it will be for you, not me," he growled.

"It will be for you, Erling, as much as for me. Mark me, Oddi," Swain turned to the scald. "I will have no misunderstanding, What casts dishonor upon Erling in this matter casts dishonor upon me. See that the king and Gregorius do not mistake me."

"You may trust in me, both of you," said Oddi briskly. "Gregorius shall have the full sense of your words. And I will tell him somewhat, too, on my own account—the big lackwit!"

The end of this was what might have been expected, what Oddi had predicted. Gregorius replied that he had been misinformed and, with King Ingi's angry visage at his shoulder, instructed the scald to explain to Swain and Erling that he had not thought to cast discredit upon their courage or achievements.

"It is probable that what I did say reached their ears distorted by those who seek to make trouble on our side," he declared uncomfortably.

But Erling only laughed harshly when Oddi repeated Gregorius's answer.

"What else could he say? Bah, he knew he might gain nothing by quarreling with you, Swain. Well, let it go! It was what I expected, and if I put up with it I must not be suspected of fearing the consequences."

"You talk like a boy," said Swain coldly. "Because Gregorius speaks without thought must you——"

"All of this I have heard before," snarled Erling, and flung himself from the room.

Now, Swain was more concerned than he admitted over this occurrence; but at the moment there was nothing else to be done, and he was obliged to rest on the determination to confront the two when Gregorius came to Bergen in the spring and compel them to settle their differences once and for all, by words, if possible, by steel, if there was no other way—so long as they confined the fighting to their two selves.

He would have been no easier in his mind had he known that Gregorius, and all those who served Gregorius, were doubly furious at being compelled to disown the gibe Erling had complained of. The seeds of misunderstanding were sown broadcast over the land, and would yield a harvest of calamity for every one, great and small.

But there is reason in the view of those, who, in after years, maintained that the disaster which came so unexpectedly to most men was unavoidable. Whether it was brought about by the inscrutable judgment of Heaven, as the priests averred; or through the magic that was associated with Olvir's name, according to the folk who credited the Roysterer's evil powers; or because of the blind operations of Fate, as some said—whichever of these influences was responsible, the coil of tragedy unwound with such obscure celerity that no man, however strong, not Swain himself, could stay the culmination of the event. Apparently, it had to be.

After the weather moderated the Princess Kristin rode down to Bergen from Studla. Men said that she came to make peace with Erling, and it is likely that this was the truth, seeing that the day following her arrival Erling left the lodgings he had shared with Swain in Unna's tavern, and took up his abode with Kristin in a house she owned by the Sand Bridge, and she, who was ordinarily a haughty woman and allowed none she met to forget that she was a king's daughter, became subdued in manner and made no attempt to enter the counsels of the chiefs. But nonetheless she strove day and night with every wile she knew to regain the influence she had once exerted over Erling—with what success shall be shown.

Of itself her coming was a little thing, yet it had mighty consequences, for, as Erik Skallagrim's son was wont to say, "many a little thing has been a great man's bane."

To Swain and all his folk she was kindly and considerate, as if she had never entertained feeling against him; and Swain, on his part, yielded her the respect that was due to her birth and position as his friend's wife. But he had no liking for her.

"Here is a mare that would play the stallion," he grumbled once to Erik.

A few days later a messenger came from King Ingi saying that he was embarking his folk aboard the ships in the Gaut River and would soon be in Bergen.

"And I would have Swain make all possible arrangements in advance of my coming for going against Hakon."

"Easy enough to say," grunted Swain to Erling. "Humph, we will set up Ingi's banner here, and send the fire arrow up the dales and down to the seaside. You bide in Bergen and greet the chiefs who come in, and I will take a few score men and go north and see if I can learn what Hakon intends."

"That is all we can do," agreed Erling. "But I believe you may be confident that whatever Hakon attempts he will stay ashore. He has few ships left after his losses in the River Fight, and moreover, his carls will be loath to try deck fighting again."

"If that proves to be so then our task becomes easier," answered Swain.

And he rode off the next day.

In Bergen Erling went diligently at the task of raising the chiefs for Ingi, and with fair success, although most of them put off coming until the king had arrived on the plea that they must attend to the spring planting, which was reasonable. But there was a fine muster of spears to greet the king's longships, and Ingi was highly pleased.

"Where is Swain?" the king asked immediately.

Erling told him, and added—

"He should return any day."

Ingi frowned uneasily.

"Perhaps we had best send word to him. I do not like his absence. Without him——"

Ingi did not finish the remark, but Erling—and Gregorius, too, who was standing by—knew what was in his mind: fear of trouble between the two *lendermen*.

"You need not be concerned, Lord King," Erling assured him stiffly.

And Gregorius said—

"I value Swain as much as you, but here is an opportunity to show him that we can accomplish something without him."

"If you can do so I shall be pleased," answered the king, half-ashamed of having doubted the two chiefs.

Thereafter Erling and Gregorius joined heartily in the work that was to be done, and that day they achieved as much as if Swain had been present. But the next day was very different. The trouble happened in this wise:

Gangs of men were at work on the piers shifting arms' chests from the king's longships ashore, and these men were drawn indiscriminately from Gregorius' faction as well as from the companies of those chiefs who were allied with Erling. It chanced that a housecarl of Haldor Brynjolf's son—he who once had served King Eystein and was held by Erling to have sold out his

king to King Ingi—had been bled the night before for some trifling illness, and looked very pale in the face.

A housecarl of Bjorn Nikola's son, who was sister's son to Erling and the closest to the Wrynecked of all those who followed his banner, observed the appearance of Haldor's man, and called out to him, asking why he looked like a fresh-washed shirt.

"I was bled last night," replied Haldor's man.

"Ho," jeered Bjorn's man, "you must be a puny fellow. Why, I could not look so pale if I tried for a mere bleeding."

"A steel edge in your neck would soon prove that," growled Haldor's man.

"A stronger carl than you would have to wield it," shouted Bjorn's man.

"That is soon proven," retorted Haldor's man.

"By you? Hutatut! After you have lost a whole cupful of blood!"

And with that, Haldor's man flashed out his sword and attacked Bjorn's man, and Bjorn's man hewed at him, and they trampled on the toes of the friends of each, and Haldor's folk cried that it was a shame a sick man should be put upon, and Bjorn's folk exclaimed that a bleeding should not make a warrior sick. But there was no more steel drawn at that time; the two factions fell upon each other with their fists, and with sticks and stones. It was a fair fight, and a harmless, in the beginning.

The real trouble came when Haldor's man, who was really weak from his bleeding, had his guard beaten down and suffered a sore cut upon his shoulder. Messengers flew to Haldor, who was drinking with his cronies in a near-by tavern, to tell him that one of his housecarls was wounded and his folk on the piers fighting with Bjorn's.

Haldor dropped the ale horn the instant he had the word.

"Come, all of you," he shouted to those who crowded the tavern. "I am sick of being made the butt of the enmity of Erling's friends."

"Yes, yes, Haldor," his friends shouted back. "We will teach Erling's folk a lesson."

But in the door of the tavern Haldor caught the messenger by the arm and dragged him back.

"Stay," he barked. "Who is my man who is wounded?"

The messenger shook his head.

"I do not know, Haldor. Several more of our folk are down from blows with sticks and stones."

"Well, it does not matter," said Haldor. "Though he were a rogue he should merit my help in such a case."

And it is a fact that the name of the man who was bled was never known for certain, as also the name of the man of Bjorn's who first taunted him. They were both slain in the fighting afterward, and having been trampled upon, their bodies were not recognized. Two unknown common men, and they wrecked a kingdom over an idle taunt!

Haldor reached the scene of the brawl at a moment when his partisans were outnumbered, and notwithstanding the growing bitterness of the struggle he refrained from using steel, setting his friends and followers to assail Bjorn's folk with their fists and whatever natural weapons they could find. And because his people were now greatly superior to Bjorn's he had things all his own way, and drove Bjorn's headlong from the strand, beating savagely whoever they could seize upon in the confusion.

So Bjorn's folk sent a man running to their chief, bidding him come and rescue them from Haldor's attack; and Bjorn, who was a young man and a lusty, and heated in his rage, ran through the streets of the town, crying up all who were friendly to Erling, and by the time he reached the lower town he was at the head of a troop far stronger than Haldor's. He soon turned the fray against his opponents, but the worst of it was that he was not content to fight with fists and sticks. At the first sight of the way in which his men were being mauled he bade the housecarls with him "out swords!" and hewed into Haldor's ranks with the steel.

IN THE winking of an eye what had been a brawl, merciless and sanguinary, to be sure, but yet a brawl, became a street battle. Haldor's folk, too, drew their swords. Spears commenced to glint back and forth; arrows swished from windows overhead. Outnumbered again and overborne, Haldor's folk retired around a corner and formed a shieldwall, and against this ordered barrier Bjorn stormed in vain, his numbers paralyzed by the narrow bounds in which they fought.

There was still time to halt the fight before it went too far; had Swain been there

he might have pried the enemies apart. But it was not to be. Fresh messengers were dispatched by both sides, summoning fresh aid. Gregorius, talking peaceably with a group of chiefs in Unna's tavern, was told that Erling's folk were slaughtering Haldor's down by the piers.

"Ha," said Simon Skalp, who sat with Gregorius, "it is probable that Erling plans to rid himself of an issue with you, Gregorius, by slaying those of us who once served Eystein, and who, thanks to you, have been received into King Ingi's service."

Gregorius started up, purple with anger.

"By ——!" he swore. "There is another side to this matter. Put on your armor, friends, we will see if such treachery shall go unavenged."

Scores of men followed him, almost all of them fully armored, and when he came to where Bjorn's was storming against Haldor's shieldwall he easily swayed the balance in Haldor's favor. Bjorn was driven back, step by step, and the struggle became bloodier than ever.

And now the word of what was toward was fetched to Erling, who was at meat with a party of friends in the Princess Kristin's house.

"Hurry, Erling!" panted the messengers. "Gregorius and Haldor Brynjolf's son and Simon Skalp and all the Vikenfolk have joined together and are slaying Bjorn and others of your friends. They have driven us up from the piers, and it is like to go hard with us if we do not shortly have aid."

Erling's ugly face turned white with the intensity of his passion, but his normal caution helped him to secure a grip upon himself.

"Truly, this is a more evil deed than I should have expected of Gregorius," he said. "I will go straightway to King Ingi, and bid him come and see what harm Gregorius would work against our common cause."

No man of those present said no to this, but Kristin, lifting his shield and helm from where they rested on the floor, exclaimed:

"This is a black dishonor Gregorius casts upon you, husband. It reflects no less upon our son and upon me, in whose veins runs the blood of kings. What shall be said of us after the swords have been sheathed?"

"I know not," replied Erling. "What boots us now is to stop the fray lest it wax so violent it lights a flame beyond quenching."

"Perhaps that flame has been lighted," she said softly. "Bethink you, Erling, will it take from the dishonor Gregorius has flung at us that men should be able to say we shielded behind King Ingi?"

Erling's features were twisted into a knot of baffled rage.

"True," he gasped. "Blessed saints, what should I do! If only Swain was here!"

"Too long you have rested upon the Orkneyman," counseled Kristin in her soft voice, with the purring undernote of hate. "Come, husband, I counsel you not to allow the Norsefolk to laugh at you, and spoil thereby our son's chance to win the throne."

Through the open door of the house came a distant echo of war cries, harshly clear.

"Either way lies misfortune," growled Erling. "What a plight!"

Kristin fitted the helm upon his head, and then offered him the shield.

"The lesser misfortune lies always upon the honorable side of an issue," she advised him. "This matter has passed beyond the king's mediation. You can not afford to let Gregorius say that you feared to protect your folk against him. Men would term you niddering and your banner would never again draw followers to the field. What! With Bjorn, your sister's son, assailed by all the king-slayers and traitors in Gregorius's train—— "

Erling snatched the shield from her.

"It is the truth!" he groaned. "Well, this is none of my doing. If Gregorius will act so, I can not help but fight him."

His men went out with him from Kristin's house, and as they passed down toward the strand they blew *ludr*-horns and hailed to them hundreds of others, including numerous town dwellers who had come to entertain a high regard for Erling during the months he and Swain had spent in Bergen. Erling's followers likewise drew to them men from the retinues of other chiefs of the surrounding district by their shouts that the vikenmen were falling upon the king's northern folk.

When Erling's band reached the streets wherein the fighting continued they tipped the scale decisively. Gregorius and those with him were pressed back steadily, albeit Erling and his allies bade them stand and bide the shock.

"This will not be considered creditable to you, Gregorius," Erling shouted to his former friend over the intervening shields.

"You thought to slay a handful of my folk by stealth, and so soon as a few more of us come against you you are all for flight."

"That is a lie," answered Gregorius hotly. "It was not we who began this. Your folk were beating mine, and yet we did not use steel. No great harm was done until Bjorn attacked us with the edge."

"Who lies now?" challenged Bjorn, beside Erling. "And what does it matter whether you were slaying my carls with stones or with swords? They died, one way or the other."

In the middle of this wrangle King Ingi rode up with a scant half dozen of his guards. He had been at confession in the Church of St. Nikolas when one of his attendants told him his courtmen were slaying one another, and he had promptly descended toward the piers with those who had accompanied him. He rode by chance into Gregorius' array, calling out to those nearest him to know why they spilt the blood of friends when they might soon expect to have Hakon to fight.

"This is an ill deed, Gregorius," he shouted to the *lenderman*, catching sight of his burly figure. "So soon as you and Erling are together in the same town you come to blows. I say this is a sorry day for you—yes, and for me, and for Norway!"

"You do not understand, Lord King," answered Gregorius. "It has been none of my seeking."

"Then, perhaps, you can tell me how it chanced in this fashion?" returned the king.

"Why, as to that," rejoined Gregorius uncertainly, "no man seems to be sure, except that our folk were brawling with their bare hands, when Bjorn came at us, wielding steel and loosing shafts, and we——"

"Ha, that is your story!" exclaimed the king. "Probably Erling's folk would——"

At that moment a man in the ranks surrounding Erling cast a spear which whistled close to the king's ear.

"Back, Ingi," called Gregorius. "This is no place for you."

"My place is always where my people need me," answered the king, undismayed.

But a cry rose from the rear of the mass of men following Erling.

"Ingi is on the side of the vikenmen!"

And others echoed it—

"Slay the Hunchback!"

"The King is with Gregorius!"

"Out swords, carls, and have at them!"

Now, Erling and the responsible chiefs opposite turned upon their folk, and rebuked them for this, for they saw clearly that the king was striving to find a way to keep the peace; but before they had cowed the outbreak against Ingi several shafts were loosed at him, and these afforded color for Gregorius and two or three more to seize the bridle of the king's horse, and lead him forcibly away from the fight.

"It is not by his own will that Ingi is in the ranks of Gregorius' folk," said Erling. "I will slay the man who injures him, but we shall do well to rescue him from such an ignoble position. On, carls, push shields!"

They ran after Gregorius's array, and Gregorius had to give more ground, for he was hopelessly outnumbered. He perceived this, and came to a decision not to permit his folk to be uselessly slaughtered.

"Do you retire, Lord King," he advised Ingi. "There are some bad people on Erling's side who would not hesitate to slay you, if they had the opportunity. I will take my folk into the Nikolas church, where we shall have sanctuary, and afterward you can pacify Erling and come to terms with him—for I think that as soon as his anger cools he will regret what he has done."

Ingi's pallid cheeks were more gaunt and care worn than usual; his eyes were dull coals deep in his head.

"It is all that can be done," said the crippled king heavily. "Ah, God, what a sorrowful day! We shall pay dearly for this, every one of us."

He turned his horse's head to ride clear of Gregorius's column.

"You are none of you the man Swain is," he added bitterly. "We should not have come to such a pass had he been here."

XIV

SWAIN reached Bergen at evensong of the day of the Street Fray, as it was called. Several of the townfolk met him in the fields outside the town, and gave him an account of the affair before he entered. He sat his horse silently until they had finished, his men crowding close to hear the tale; his eyes were fixed upon the huddled roofs in front of him, the silvery waters of Hardanger Fjord, the riffle of masts where Ingi's longships lay beside the piers.

"When the old dog left the kennel the

pups quarreled," he said finally. "This will be brave news for Hakon."

And no more did he say. He gathered up his reins, lifted his arm in a gesture of command and rode on into the town, with his troop jingling after him. There was still light when he came to the open space surrounding the Nikolas church, which was thronged with Erling's folk, leaning on spears or shields, watching where King Ingi on horseback conversed with Gregorius, who stood in the church door. Erling was a pace or two behind the king.

"Out of the way, carls," ordered Swain harshly, pricking his horse forward.

"It is Swain," murmured the outer ranks.

The murmur spread like a ripple—

"Swain is come!"

"Here is the Orkneyman!"

"Back, carls, back! Way for Kingsbane!"

Ingi heard the murmur, and he turned curiously to see what was toward. Erling also looked over his shoulder, and Gregorius shielded his eyes from the straight rays of the setting sun and peered across the open space that was flooded with crimson light—so that the square seemed to be bathed in a sea of blood, portent of the days to come.

Ingi's wan face brightened.

"It is Swain!" exclaimed the crippled king. "Welcome, Swain. Ah, if only the blessed Olaf had guided you hither a few hours ago!"

"The blessed Olaf nor any other saint—or God, for that matter—will aid folk as stupid as these," snapped Swain. "What do you here?"

"I am trying to arrive at a composition between Gregorius and Erling," answered the king. "But they——"

He hesitated, and both the *lendermen* looked away, refusing to meet the cold glance Swain bent upon each in turn.

"What does it signify whether you compose their differences now?" asked Swain in a voice like the drip of an icicle. "Already, they have ruined themselves—and us."

Ingi set his jaw doggedly.

"Let them set off slain man against slain man, wound against wound, limb against limb," urged the king," Then we can arrange man-bote in proportion, and perhaps banish the memory of this sorry day."

"I do act think so," said Swain. "There is a curse upon them which can not be lifted so easily."

"You may well say there is a curse upon some here," cried Gregorius. "It is by God's providence alone that the king is not dead from the spears and arrows Erling had cast at him."

"In your teeth!" shouted Erling. "Who are you, with your train of paid assassins and king-sellers, traitors all, to accuse me so?"

A growl went up from the folk ringed around the church, and an answering growl came from the windows and doors of the edifice, packed with armored men.

Swain drew his sword, slowly, deliberately.

"The man that lifts steels or looses shaft I will slay in that moment," he said in the same chill tones, "be he Erling, Gregorius, yes, or the king!"

The growl died away to utter silence, a silence as painful as a blow.

"Now, do you hear me," Swain continued, "all of you. And be silent, except I bid you speak! Does any man know who began this fray?"

There was no answer.

"It is a great honor to both sides," he commented sarcastically. "You do not even know who brought about the slaughter. A man told another man he looked pale—and so you fought!"

"It was a housecarl of Bjorn Nikola's son, a sister's son of Erling, who made the taunt," answered Gregorius.

"Yes, and a housecarl of Haldor Brynjolf's son—Haldor the king-seller!—who drew steel to reply to the taunt, instead of trusting to his fists," exclaimed Erling.

"Ah, but the fray was harmless enough until Bjorn cried 'out swords!'" retorted Gregorius.

"Because your people were slaying ours with sharp stakes and stones," cried Erling.

"At any rate, it was not my folk who attempted to slay the king!" jeered Gregorius.

"For that your folk had ringed him around and acclaimed that he was with you and against us," protested Erling.

"Peace!" commanded Swain.

The Orkneyman's fierce gaze beat down the sullen opposition of the two chiefs. They shuffled their feet, hung their heads.

"You have accused yourselves in what you have said, each of you," he pursued. "Each of you has been disloyal to the king. Each has wronged the other. My advice to the king is that he shall declare you to

have forfeited any claim, Erling upon Gregorius or Gregorius upon Erling, by what has passed. The wrong is equal on either side."

He paused, and Ingi spoke up.

"That is good advice, Swain. I accept it."

"Further," Swain continued, "my judgment is that you shall return, each of you, to your duty on the king's behalf."

"I am the king's man," said Gregorius stoutly; "but I would know this, Swain: do you and Ingi propose to protect Haldor and Simon Skalp and their folk and the rest of the Vikenmen who came over to us from Eystein, against Erling's vengeance?"

"They are the king's men no less than yourself," answered Swain. "And the king must protect his men."

Erling had been biting at his mustaches throughout this dialog. Now he burst forth in angry denunciation.

"What? Am I to be expected to march shoulder to shoulder with proven traitors, with men who have tried to slaughter my folk when they went about the king's business here in Bergen? In Bergen, by ——, which they held for the king all winter the while Gregorius' carls ate and drank themselves fat in Viken? I say, 'No!' "

"Do I understand that you refuse to serve King Ingi, Erling?" inquired Swain coolly.

"In Gregorius' company?" rasped Erling. "Yes—a thousand times yes!"

Ingi heeled his horse closer to the *lenderman.*

"Bethink you, Erling," said the king, "am I to dismiss from my service stout friends and loyal simply because you do not like them?"

Erling drew a hand across his forehead uncertainly, brows knit in thought.

"Why—if I— But no, Lord King, there can be no two ways of viewing the question. I will fight for you if you will have me, but I will never again trust myself and my friends in the shieldwall with the fellows that beset us today."

"There is no mistaking your feelings," commented Swain. "Is it your purpose, then, to march out from us and cast in your fortunes with Hakon?"

Erling's ugly features became a sodden gray color.

"No, no, no," he reiterated. "But—do you not see, Swain? I can not honorably continue in company with Gregorius and men I despise."

"My opinion is that Gregorius is at least as honorable as yourself," rejoined Swain calmly.

"You have a broader charity than I, in the case," returned Erling. "He was a good comrade once—but that was before he made common cause with men like Haldor and Simon. I can not afford to have their names joined with mine or my son's."

"It is in my mind that I have heard that argument before," remarked Swain. "It has a womanish ring in my ears. Humph! Let me tell you, Erling, that your son has come by small good this day. Gregorius is a better friend to him than some others, perhaps."

"True talk," called Gregorius. "If I had a son who I hoped to make king I would not listen overmuch to the cross-bench fillies."

Erling slung his shield on his back, where it came to rest with a hollow clang.

"Here, it seems, I am in the way of insults, which it is not fitting that I should answer," he said. "And as the king does not want me——"

"No, no, Erling, I do want you," interrupted Ingi.

"Ah, Lord King, but you want Gregorius and his friends, likewise, and it has been said before that oil and water will not mix."

"Nor will Hakon give you and your son better fare than Ingi offered Broadshoulders," said Swain.

"That is to be seen. At the least, I can retire to Studla, and farm my land in peace."

"How long?" challenged Swain. "Come, Erling, this is the last time I ask it of you. Will you really disrupt the king's cause for petty spite? Oh, call it what you will, an honorable motive, a principle, anything! But will you insist that he shall refuse the aid of Gregorius if he is to have your assistance?"

"I insist upon nothing," replied Erling, "save that I will not fight in company with Gregorius so long as he——"

Swain checked him with a gesture.

"Enough! We waste time. This brawl has ended. Gather your folk, and march them out of Bergen."

"Out of Bergen?" objected Erling. "Why, night draws on, and——"

"This is the king's town," said Swain sharply. "It is held by the king's men. You and your folk are not the king's men; you are professed enemies to the king's men. You must go."

He raised his great voice in a bellow that rang through the thickening twilight.

"Ho, there, carls! Erling's folk to the right. Those who will bide and serve Ingi to the left."

There was a rustling among the hundreds of men around the church, and gradually they divided into two unequal groups, the larger consisting of the townfolk and the followings of neighboring chiefs who had joined Gregorious' faction in the Street Fight. But those who stood by Gregorious were little less numerous.

They marched from the town close to a thousand strong, and many who at first had hesitated to take so definite a step decided later that Ingi's cause was not worth the risk of life and gear, and left him either secretly or openly, while of the chiefs who had agreed to join the king for the summer's warfare fully half remained away on one excuse or another. That was a black day for Ingi.

Erling watched the division of the folk in the square before the church in a dumb stupor of mingled anger, regret and foreboding. But he made no move to stay it. Only when the two groups of men had been formed he came up to the king and Swain, and offered them his hand.

"I would not have had this happen," he said. "It is not my fault."

Ingi took his hand limply.

"If the fray was not your fault," answered the king, "so much can not be said for your desertion of your comrades in arms of former years."

"I am sorry," said Erling blankly.

And he offered his hand to Swain. But the Orkneyman ignored it.

"It was you fetched me into these kings' wars," growled Swain. "You called upon my friendship and the memory of a venture we made in company to Mikligard—Constantinople. And now you abandon me, you abandon Gregorius who stood your friend until a foolish woman put foolish ideas into your head, you abandon Ingi, your friend as well as your king—yes, and the best friend your son has. Bah, Erling, you deserve the bad luck you shall reap from this! When next you come to me pleading for my help I shall think of today."

Erling flushed, and drew himself erect with rough dignity.

"I shall not come."

"Oh, yes, you will," jeered Swain. "All men come to me when they are in trouble."

Erling turned without a word, and strode away, his mail clanking as he walked. He barked a short order to his housecarls and friends, they formed in a dark clump of shadowy figures and swung off through a street which led toward the Sand Bridge and the house of the Princess Kristin.

"And this comes of a mare wanting to play the stallion!" rumbled Swain.

King Ingi sagged in his saddle, very small, very tired, his hump more noticeable than ever.

"It is a battle for young Hakon," he said wearily.

"It is," agreed Swain. "But we must make the best of it. Heart up, King! I knew when I first had the tidings that we might not persuade Erling to act with Gregorius. He is like all cautious men, slow to anger, but a bull in determination. And moreover, he has a wife I would give a halter to. But we have been in worse plights before today. Even without Erling, we are stronger than Hakon."

XV

ALTHOUGH, as Swain had said, Ingi was still stronger than Hakon the day Erling left Bergen, the effect of the Wrynecked's defection was gradually to reduce the numbers of Ingi's folk and to multiply Hakon's. For the weak point in Ingi's case, in the eyes of the Norsefolk, was his crippled condition; men instinctively distrusted the ability of a king who was sickly, no matter how brave and determined he might be, and they were inclined to exaggerate the importance of any misfortunes he sustained for this same reason.

"Erling has abandoned the Hunchback," ran the whisper from end to end of the land. "Yes, Skakki has quarreled with him. There was not room at Ingi's court for two men as big as Erling and Gregorius."

"Ha," said the wise men. "Gregorius is wealthy, and a good fighter, but you can never tell which way he will jump. Erling, now, is a cautious carl. Ingi will have an uncertain future."

"Swain has bided with Ingi," answered the younger chiefs to such talk. "Who ever bested the Orkneyman?"

"No man succeeds always," croaked the elders. "Also, Swain is an outlander. Is it well for Norsemen to see an Orkney viking

farer become all-powerful behind the throne? Why, even Gregorius dares not step from his skalli without Swain's advice!"

"And look how wealthy and powerful Gregorius has grown by following Swain's counsel," retorted the younger chiefs.

"That was when Erling and Gregorius fought side by side," rejoined the elders. "They have had little luck, the two of them, since Gregorius must fetch Simon Skalp and Haldor Brynjolf's son to Ingi's Court."

"But Hakon has had no luck at all since Swain returned from the Orkneyar! Twice Swain has——"

"That was Swain's luck, to be sure," granted the croakers. "But the wise man will not commit himself to a luck overstrained. Moreover, Ingi is a cripple. It is a hard task to be for ever bolstering a king who is twisted out of manly form and can not bear his fair share of the weapon work. He has wished to conquer the land for himself all these past years, and he and Swain have been the death of his two brothers; but how are we better off for all the hewing and ship-slaughter? No, no, he is not the king for such an undertaking! Hakon, on the other hand, is well called the Broadshouldered. It may be he——"

This kind of talk was buzzing in every village and stead in Norway, and if it sent few men to Hakon it stopped all those who had promised to answer Ingi's war arrows, and induced some of those who had joined him in Bergen or who remained in Viken to hold that district for him to follow Erling's example and return to their homes. There was doubt in the land, and doubt is a potent poison.

True, it should have wreaked damage equally in Hakon's following, but Hakon's folk were not like Ingi's, men with property to lose and interests to protect; no, they were outlaws, wastrels, masterless men, chiefs whose estates Ingi had seized. They had everything to win, nothing to lose. And those men in similar case, who, from doubt or fear or canniness, had not yet joined Hakon, now went to him as rapidly as they could, for they reckoned his chances to have been improved even as Ingi's had been diminished. Before the summer was over all the landless men in Norway were with Broadshoulders.

Swain realized what was happening, and by his advice King Ingi made no attempt to force conclusions with their enemies.

"We have lost a battle," said Swain. "Let us admit that. If we do so, and conduct our affairs with moderation it may be we can regain what we lost. But if, being situated as we are, we plunge hastily into peril and endeavor to retrieve our loss at a single stroke we are more likely to lose all we now possess."

Gregorius, who had sat gloomily by through the discussion, gnawing his fingers and tugging at his beard, spoke out in gruff dissent:

"What have we to fear from going against Hakon? We have always beaten him. We are as many as he, and we have met him before when he was ten to our one. I think a troll has stolen your wits, Swain. What? Was Erling so important that we must dodder about Bergen the summer long for lack of him, fearful of crossing steel with a foe who has always fled us? Men will say we fear Hakon—when, if we made one quick, strong push, we should overset him, and either drive him from the land or take his life."

Ingi looked worried, but Swain heard out this speech in silence, nor did the Orkneyman answer it until several moments had elapsed.

"You were seldom one to reckon in advance the effect of what you undertook, Gregorius," he commented then. "And your rash counsel comes well from the man who was responsible for our having compelled to inaction, when otherwise we might have harried Hakon to the wall."

"I was not responsible," exclaimed Gregorius passionately. "Erling, as you know——"

"Bah! You were both responsible, but will you quibble with me over that? I say both, carl, and I mean both. Your fault was as great as Erling's. It will serve you justly if you come to lose all by your folly. Folly! That was what Jarl Harald termed my coming hither, and I begin to believe he must have foresight of the future."

Gregorius shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

"Touching the fighting, I suppose I was to blame equally with Erling, but is it my fault that Erling will not stay with the king because the king will have me and my friends to serve him?"

Ingi intervened as Swain was about to speak.

"Put it how you will, Gregorius, Swain is right in saying that you and Erling,

between you, wrecked our plans for the summer. If you had stopped to think of that when the war cries were raised on the piers I believe you would have come to me first, rather than join in the slaying."

The king's grave voice touched the *lenderman's* affection for him.

"I hope I should have done so, Lord King," mumbled Gregorius. "I have always placed your interests before mine, as you know."

"I do know it," admitted Ingi. "And therefore I am at a loss to understand why, having acted rashly so recently, you would now have Swain and the rest of us arrange our plans with similar rashness?"

"If it be rashness," said Gregorius unwillingly, "I——"

"Of course, it is rashness," snapped Swain

The Orkneyman rose and commenced to pace to and fro in the private chamber they occupied.

"I tell you one false step, Gregorius, and the king's head flies off—your's with it. Ingi has worn the crown for many years, eh? You have been powerful most of that time. Do you think the two of you have made no secret enemies, aside from those who move openly against you? Do you think that there are not plenty of men among those who have served you in the past, both of you, who do not hate me because I am what I am and the king heeds me? Do you think there are not plenty of men who would gladly join Hakon the day they believed it safe to do so, and escape our vengeance?"

"But why 'one false step'?" objected Gregorius. "We have taken many steps in safety, and——"

"I say 'one false step,' and that is what I mean. Just that! Because if we suffered any considerable reverse that would be sufficient to start the whole pack of wolves who hate us in full cry. They would cast off their lingering remnants of fear, and gather from every quarter of the land. As it is, we are fortunate in that Hakon fears to try us at sea, partly for shortage of ships, partly because his folks consider we are better at the shipwork. So we do not have to watch him off shore.

"But on the land we must keep a constant lookout upon him, and my judgement is that, rather than attempt to bring him to a folk hewing, shieldwall to shieldwall, we should simply watch and wait, warding against his forays, striking back carefully when the occasion serves, vigilant always for an opportunity to trap him, even as we should be vigilant against his trapping us."

"Perhaps you are right," said Gregorius.

"He is right," declared the king.

"I know that I am right," affirmed Swain. "Let the time pass so that folk forget the setback we have had, and then—Well, that day is to consider when it has arrived."

XVI

WHEN Hakon heard that Erling had left Ingi, and further tidings reached him of the dismay the event had caused among the crippled king's followers, he summoned his counsellors and asked them if it was not time that they took some step which would remind the Norsefolk they were to be reckoned with in the land; and Sigurd of Reyr, Olvir Rosta and all others who answered him were of the one mind, that they should strike out at Ingi. But, as Swain had foretold, they were unwilling to try the sea, and the end of it was that they fared for Viken by the upper road, burning and marauding in their path —also securing hundreds of men to swell their ranks.

Ingi had news of this at once, and Swain advised that they should likewise go to Viken, but by sea.

"Once we are there Hakon will be compelled to keep to the uplands, and can do little harm to our friends," said Swain.

"What of Bergen?" asked the king.

"You may leave the townfolk to take care of themselves," returned Swain. "One thing in our favor is that the merchants have small use for Hakon. They will stand our friends when others fail us."

And this was so. The Bergenfolk were loath to see the king and his courtmen and their companies depart, but they gave hearty assurance that come what might they would hold the town for Ingi.

Hakon fled up from the seaside in Viken so soon as Ingi's ships were sighted, and began to ravage the farms inland; but this, too, Swain put a stop to by dividing Ingi's forces. The king was established in Oslo—now Christiania—Gregorius held Konungahela and Swain passed back and forth between the two. And in a week or two, after his raiding parties had been cut up by one or another of Ingi's chiefs, Hakon

retired finally into the uplands, lurking under cover of the mountain forests like a wolf watching a sheepfold for a sign that the shepherd has departed.

"It is true that we are in some danger with our forces divided," Swain admitted to the king; "but so long as we do not move out of reach of our ships we can always go to the aid of our friends if they are attacked, and in the same fashion they can come to us should there be need. Also, in no other way can we protect the Vikenfolk who are loyal to you, short of marching out to attack Hakon in the open—and that would be foolishness, as I have told Gregorius."

So they came to midsummer, and then one day, while Swain was at Oslo with the king, a messenger reached the town from Jarl Harald in the Orkneys, a clerk from the monastery on Egilsey named Ragan. This messenger found Swain at noon-meat with King Ingi, and delivered his message straightway in open hall.

"The Jarl greets you by me, Swain," he said. "And he bids me say to you that the Orkneyfolk have been sore ravaged by the Sudreyar vikings. Gudrod, their king, has burned villages on Strionsey and Rognvaldsey, and the coast of Caithness is desolate."

"I left him five longships and most of my men when I fared for Norway," replied Swain. "He should have sufficient folk without me, who can not fetch him four swords beside my own."

"Ah, but your sword is worth a thousand, Swain!" answered the clerk, Ragan. "So says the Jarl. You must know, too, that since you left the Orkneyar the Sudreyar vikings have increased greatly in number; all loose carls have flocked to join Gudrod's banner, and they no longer cruise south, seeing that the English are taking to the sea and have strong stone *borgs* all along the Bretland—British—coasts."

"This is ill news," growled Swain. "I have no liking for turning my mind from one undertaking to another. Say, carl! Can not the Jarl succeed without me?"

The clerk shook his head.

"The folk speak of appealing to the Scots King for succor if you do not return to them."

Swain scowled across the hall.

"That is bad. No, no, we can never suffer the Scots to come in. Once in, they would be hard to put out." He turned to the king, beside him. "You have heard," he said. "There is naught for me to do but go in answer to Jarl Harald's appeal. I will do much for you, king, but first of all I am an Orkneyman, and the Orkneyfolk come first with me."

A shadow clouded Ingi's pain-racked features.

"Misfortunes crowd me fast," he remarked sadly. "Without you, Swain, I shall be easy to topple over, I fear. And Gregorius requires your hand to steady him."

"I would not go if I could help it," acknowledged Swain. "But if you and Gregorius will bide close, and take no risks, you should be able to hold your own until I can return. I know how to curb these Sudreyar folk. They are a wild, poor lot, clothed in skins, with little save fish for food, and they rob for want of other work to do.

"The southlands easily repel such as they, and so they have taken to moonlight raids upon our Orkneyfolk. One of our steads contains great wealth for a whole crew of them. But if we push home a blow at them, burn their huts and wreck their ships on the beach, they will crawl like dogs at our feet. Yes, yes, I know well what to do. Wait until the first breath of winter sends them to shelter, then ravage them ashore."

"Are they good warriors?" inquired the king idly.

"Yes and no. They fight in a horde like wolves. When fortune attends them they are not to be beaten. But hew into them bravely, and as like as not they will flee."

Ingi played with his wine cup as Swain talked, and suddenly the shadow lifted from his face.

"How if I purchased their help, Swain?" he cried.

"Whose?" asked Swain, puzzled.

"The Orkneyar folk. You say they are poor. I have plenty of gold, and I need fighting men. They can fight. And if you brought them to Norway on my behalf that would relieve Jarl Harald of their menace."

A startled look crept into Swain's ordinarily impassive face.

"Humph!" growled the Orkneyman. "Perhaps. But you little know the Sudreyar folk, King, or you would not be anxious to have them by you. A yapping pack of

little, furry, snarly people, treacherous even amongst themselves."

"I have gold," reiterated the king. "Hakon has none. It would be to their interest to fight for me."

Swain revolved this in his mind. Finally he nodded a reluctant consent.

"Yes, what you say is true. Still—I distrust them. Olvir Rosta used to hunt with them years ago when our feud was young, and I came to know them there. Gudrod would sell his brother for the right price, and so would any of his folk."

"If we know their weakness we can guard against it," suggested Ingi.

"No, for they have a cunning not to be sounded," denied Swain. "However, as you say, you have the gold they seek. As long as they are not numerous enough by themselves to overthrow you— And it would help Jarl Harald. Past doubt! Yes, it is worth trying, King. But never trust them. And when you have had enough of them send them forth of the land. I tell you Hakon's outlaws are tame sheep compared to Gudrod's wolves."

"So they are fighting men I care little for their ways," exclaimed the king eagerly. "It is warriors we require, Swain. Let us prove to these sluggard Norsefolk of mine that we are free of their help, and the land will rise for us as before."

"The Norsefolk have never loved outlanders," said Swain doubtfully. "They have always held it against me because——"

"We are past indulging their prejudices now," interrupted the king. "You know, as I know, we can not spend another summer in idleness, making faces at Hakon above our shields. Next spring we must strike—or sample exile. And I am for striking. Yes, I would strike before spring, if we can. When should you return?"

But Swain shook his head to this question.

"How can I say? I must fare for the Orkneyar first, talk with Jarl Harald, weigh the offenses the raiders have commited, in order to be able to beat them to proper terms. Afterward I must seek out Gudrod, and reach an agreement with him. Give him time, next, to rally his crews, and the return voyage hither. It requires many months, King. Yes, if we come before spring we shall be lucky."

"Would the Sudreyar men fear a winter voyage?" inquired the king anxiously.

"That must depend upon the winter. They are men born with duck webs between their toes, our folk say, and they fear the water as little as any. But even the Iceland folk respect Rann's Bath in anger. Leave it that I shall do what I can. If I can win them at all I will fetch them to Norway at the earliest day."

"But not before Yule?"

"No, long past Yule, I think. Bid your priests to pray for moderate weather."

Swain rose with a satirical grimace.

"For myself, I shall buy an old horse and sacrifice him to the old gods. It is my experience that They are more potent at sea than this God your priests worship."

XVII

DEATHBRINGER had fair winds in her Orkneyfaring, which was fortunate, for Swain was short-handed because of the manscathe in the River Fight under Hising. After he made his landfall at Hellisness in Sandey he steered south, refusing to put in to Gairsey where his own property was situated, and ran west into Medallandshofn—Midland Harbor, Scapa Floe—and dropped his anchor off Jarl Harald's stead at Orphir on the south coast of Hrossey.

There was a great rush of folk to the strand, but the first to greet Swain was the Jarl, himself.

"Ho, Swain," exclaimed Harald, "so you have found the way back to us! I was of two minds whether you would heed my message."

"It is the old story," growled Swain. "When there is trouble in the Orkneyar Swain must bear the brunt."

The Jarl's swart face became purple with indignation.

"'Old story,'" he snorted. "It is well said! And by you, who went off on a pursuit of folly, for all the arguments I might declare to you! What did I say, eh? I told you Ingi's cause was hopeless when Erling and Gregorius broke their friendship, and I was right. You brought them together for a while, but that was all. Now, men say, Ingi is in an evil plight, and you and Gregorius are put to it to keep his banner flying."

"Men do not always say the truth," rejoined Swain. "Erling's departure was an ill stroke for us, but we have made head

without him. We shall yet make an end of Hakon."

He frowned.

"But more harm to Ingi than the loss of Erling, perhaps, is that you must cry me away from him when he requires me most."

Jarl Harald forgot his indignation, with a gesture of appeal.

"I was loath to send to you, Swain, and for that you will credit me. But we have been sore beset. Gudrod is nigh as sore a blight as was Olvir Rosta—and we can never pin him down to meet us in open fight. It is a foray north in Westrey one night, and the next ricks burning in Haey or boats seized west by Kolbeinsey. We have had the longships out a score of times this summer, let alone a year past when it all began, but little good has it done us. For if we seize a *snekke* of the filthy sea wolves, what does it profit us? We may slay them, but that is all. They have less gear than a troop of thralls."

"Bah," grunted Swain. "The way to handle Gudrod's folk is to hunt them in their dens. If you had taken your longships to the Sudreyar——"

"But I did! Before midsummer was gone."

"Yes, and their lookouts gave them notice of your coming, and they were off with their women and gear to seek shelter in Irland—Ireland. No, no, Harald, the time to go against Gudrod is after the breaking of winter, when his ships are out of water."

The Jarl's face fell.

"I had not thought of that. So we must wait until snow flies before we push off?"

"No so," denied Swain. "I expect to push off by the morrow."

"By the morrow! Holy Saint Magnus, Swain, I can not raise our folk so soon."

"I do not require your folk," answered Swain, grinning. "Or, rather, I require no more than two score, it may be, to fill the gaps on my rowing-benches."

He turned to the Orkneyfolk who crowded around them on the strand, the Jarl's housecarls and servants, villagers, fishermen, men from nearby steads.

"Well, carls, what do you say?" he demanded. "I sailed with six score men, and I bring home less than four score. He who fares with me is as like to eat steel as mutton. I have places for two score more, perhaps a few extra. Are there any among you would serve as ravens' bait?"

The crowd became a whirlpool of tossing arms and legs as men fought to gain a way to the front ranks.

"I go, Swain!"

"Here am I—Kari Jon's son!"

"Save a place for Hroald of Knarrarstead!"

"Humph," growled Swain, "it seems that your men are still willing to fight if they have the chance, Harald."

The Jarl's mouth gaped with astonishment.

"But two score men, Swain! You would go against Gudrod with only your own crew! You are mad. Not even you could —— Why, Gudrod has forty *snekkes* with him when he forays abroad!"

"I am going to him with a peace shield," replied Swain calmly. "Ingi needs warriors; he also needs me by him. It was his idea that he should hire Gudrod's folk to fight for him. I go to the Sudreyar to carry the king's offer."

Jarl Harald blinked rapidly.

"Your king is in a sorrier plight than you admit if he will have Gudrod's people in his train," he charged. "No, no, Swain, better bide with me a week or two, and we will raise the Orkneyfolk, and visit Gudrod with such a burning as will strip his lands to the bare rocks."

"What would that accomplish?" answered Swain. "Gudrod would fare west or south. Afterward, when your carls had disbanded, he would return in your tracks to take his vengeance. I tell you that if you would assail him with effect you must wait for winter—and I have not so much time to waste. No, my plan is the best. I will persuade him and his carls to Norway, and if our cause is as low as you say they may well perish under the steel of Broadshoulders' folk."

"And you with them!" exclaimed the Jarl passionately. "It is madness, Swain, worse folly than you practiced in going to Norway against my advice."

"As to whether it is madness or folly, that the future shall determine," rasped Swain. "But this talk draws us nowhere. I have acted as I thought my honor demanded. I came here in answer to your message because I considered I owed an obligation to the Orkneyfolk before King Ingi, but if I can discharge my obligation to the Orkneyfolk in a fashion that will also

serve King Ingi, then I should be foolish or mad or folly-stricken not to do so."

"I know of old you are a hard man to turn when you have put your hand to a task," said Jarl Harald, wagging his head. "But hear me in time, and accept a friend's advice. I would cheerfully accept Gudrod's ravages rather than——"

"Hutatut!" interrupted Swain derisively. "What is come over the man? I do what I do to save you and your folk from Gudrod."

"You will pay too high a price!"

Swain laughed harshly.

"You mean Ingi will. Let be, Harald, let be! We took great store of gold and silver when we slew King Eystein, and Ingi can easily afford to pay Gudrod a price that will make him lusty for service. Likewise, remember, the Sudreyarfolk can find better plunder in Norway than in the Orkneyar."

The Jarl stared at him, half convinced.

"If it was another than you, I would buy the masses for you from the priests now. Even so, I think Olvir Rosta or some other warlock has spelled your wits."

"There is more sense in that than in other things you have said," snapped Swain. "So long as Olvir is at Hakon's elbow I stay in Norway."

They had more talk, but the result was to leave Swain's purpose unshaken, nor would he agree that Jarl Harald should accompany him to Gudrod's *vik* on the coast of Ivist in the Sudreyar.

"If you were with me Gudrod would fear a trick in my offer," quoth Swain. "Also, if you will take my advice, you will keep out of this kings' war in Norway. It is one thing for me, who am a private man, to take sides. But it is a boat of a different rig altogether for you, who are Jarl of the Orkneyar, to seem to act for Ingi."

"Why?" demanded the Jarl suspiciously. "Is it your thought that Ingi is likely to lose?"

"I did not say so," answered Swain. "But he is a fool who is not prepared to admit that his good luck may turn to bad."

Jarl Harald eyed him thoughtfully.

"That is not the speech of a man who is sure of victory, Swain," commented the Jarl.

"Oh, I shall win, unless some man betrays me or plays the fool," returned Swain.

"Then you do ill to trust to Gudrod," said the Jarl.

XVIII

GUDROD of the Sudreyar was a well served king. *Deathbringer*, thrusting her dragon beak into lifting gray combers as she emerged from the western end of Petland Fjord—with plenty of strong arms, now, to tug at the bucking ash sweeps—flushed a low, dingy *snekke*, which darted off into the mirk of the horizon, sheering wide of the Caithness coast where there was danger of Orkney longships in every *vik* and *baki*. Erik would have given chase, but Swain waved the suggestion aside.

"Why offer Gudrod an opportunity to assail our good faith?" quoth Kingsbane.

"We might see to it that none of the wolves escaped," argued Erik. "It is weeks since I had my sword out, and——"

"Let be," ordered Swain sharply. "On this path we tread softly."

And that he was wise in so deciding the future soon established. Off Hvarf, at the northwestern edge of Caithness, another *snekke* showed for a breath in the narrow gap betwixt cloudy horizon and steely sea, and when *Deathbringer* raised the mass of Liodhus (Lewis), beyond the waters of Skotland's Fjord (North Minch), a column of smoke towered aloft from a slatey headland and was repeated far southward.

"What a chance of finding Gudrod should we have had had we adopted Jarl Harald's plan, and sailed hither with the island levies?" commented Swain.

Where the Fjord straightened betwixt Skidh (Sky) and Ivist (North Uist) a dozen *snekkes* dashed out at them from the Sudreyar side, and *Deathbringer* was ringed in a huddle of dirty craft, swarming with red-bearded, bandy-legged carls, whose hairy bodies showed half naked under a scanty covering of skins and purloined cloths and mail. Shrill voices howled derisively, and a crooked arrow wavered across the dragon's deck.

Swain went to the poop gunwale and lifted the peace shield so that it was visible from every side.

"I am Swain Olaf's son," he shouted in a mixture of Gaelic and Norse. "I come from King Ingi in Norway with a message for your king."

The Sudreyarfolk knew Swain, knew him by reason of certain visitations in bygone years when they had sheltered or allied

themselves with Olvir Rosta and other enemies of the Orkneyman. Their *snekkes* withdrew a spear cast or two and their chiefs debated back and forth in high pitched, sing-song bursts of guttural speech. Presently, one of the slattern vessels pulled forward under *Deathbringer's* lee.

"Do you come with peace or war?" demanded a chief on her poop.

"With peace," answered Swain, "and an invitation to war."

The Sudreyarman looked uncertain.

"If you come on an errand for the Orkneyfolk—" he began, when Swain cut him short.

"I have said I come from King Ingi. That is enough. Shall I return to Norway, and tell Ingi——"

"No, no," protested the Sudreyarman. "We will conduct you to the king. He is south in Ivist." A grin twisted the tangle of hair that covered his pointed, foxy features. "We have reason to expect a visit from Jarl Harald; and in that case Gudrod would fare from home. But it is likely he will feel differently about you, Swain. What is the saying? 'An old enemy, a new friend.'"

"That is to be seen," replied Swain coldly.

Gudrod's stead was a collection of tumbledown thatched hovels which spewed forth endless streams of frowzy women and naked children. On the strand were a score of *snekkes* and small *skeids*. Hundreds of squat little men, all red-haired, all dirty, all bowed in the legs—Erik Skallagrim's son said, with a disgusted chuckle, that he began to fear he must have Sudreyar blood in him—all given to bickering and snarling at one another like so many cats, sat about in stolen mail, and pointed and argued and gesticulated enthusiastically.

Gudrod, himself, was a more emphatic example of his own folk. He was squatter, dirtier, crookeder in the legs, shriller of speech—and he wore more stolen gear than any other Sudreyarman. He conducted Swain up to what he called his skalli, which stank so that Swain suggested they sit outside, offered him wine stolen from a Bretland monastery and sheep carried off from Scotland, and boasted at great lengths of his feats and especially of his depredations in the Orkneyar and of what he would do if Jarl Harald came against him, until Swain became weary and cut him off abruptly.

"I have heard all that you said, Gudrod—" it was not in Swain to give this grotesque sea robber the title of king—"part of it is true, part of it is half true, most of it is lies. I know, indeed, that you have been ravaging in the Orkneyar for two seasons. But you were able to do so because I was absent in Norway."

Gudrod, half drunk on the heady wine, to which he was unused, flared into instant wrath.

"In your teeth, Swain! You nor any other man can stay me when my sea wolves are hungry. Why did you not come in arms, if you thought I feared you?"

"I came to you with a message from King Ingi, not from Jarl Harald," returned Swain. "You can agree to King Ingi's offer, in which case we will be friends, or you can refuse it, and in that case you shall have me, not Jarl Harald, to reckon with hereafter."

Gudrod fumbled at his sword hilt.

"What could you do?" he sneered. "Why, you can not leave Ivist alive if I choose to make away with you!"

"And what think you Ingi would say to that?"

"Ingi! Bah, he has more than he can handle now. Oh, I hear news, Swain. I know how matters go in Norway—and when the great folk quarrel that is the time for we people on the edge of the world to reap a rich harvest of spoil."

"Yes, if the great folk are willing to permit it," answered Swain. "But you know, Gudrod, that Jarl Harald's mistake was in attacking you during the summer, when it was easy for you to carry all your folk out of his reach. It would be another tale for the scalds to sing if he—or perhaps Ingi—came at you when winter had gripped the land, and you were pinned down here. Eh?"

Gudrod dug greasy fingers into the matted hair of his beard; his inflamed eyes shifted uneasily.

"Talk is cheap," he grumbled. "But Jarl Harald has not come in winter, nor will he, yes, nor will Ingi, for that matter. It is a long voyage to the Sudreyar."

"A long voyage, but not too long," said Swain. "Ingi controls the sea. Young Hakon has withstood us ashore, but afloat he dare not go. It would be simple for Ingi to shove off after the snow flies and fare west to the Orkneyar, pick up Jarl Harald and a few more carls and——"

"No man would venture such a voyage in winter!"

"Many men would," rejoined Swain confidently. "The day is past when the Norsefolk dread a winterfaring. No man likes it, to be sure, but if a man must he knows that he can. The Icelanders have proved that."

He let his words sink in, and for a while the two were silent, Gudrod combing the filth from his beard, face puckered in thought as he strove to weigh the truth in Swain's threats, Swain idly watching the restless throngs of the Sudreyarfolk, who strolled or squatted on the beach, wrangling among themselves, beating their women and children or staring at *Deathbringer*, rearing her huge hull high over the low-waisted craft around her

Gudrod abandoned his beard at last, and gave his attention to Swain again.

"It might be done," he admitted reluctantly. "But I think— Well, no matter. What is this message from Ingi? You speak of it, but I have yet to hear its terms."

"You have not given me an opportunity to deliver it," snarled Swain so viciously that Gudrod instinctively hunched away from him. "Sit down, carl, sit, I say! I will not harm you. What? Do you fear me here in your sty, with all your folk——"

"I fear not you or whoever sent you," Gudrod snarled back.

But his snarl was half hearted, and he broke off when Swain eyed him with those chilly blue eyes that had frowned down many an angry man.

"Humph," snorted Swain. "Perhaps, perhaps not. My message is simple. Ingi has heard that you can not find occupation for your folk, and must go raiding and burning continually. As it happens, he can use profitably a few hundred extra warriors, and——"

A sly look crept into Gudrod's shifty eyes.

"Ho, he needs men! That does not look like a king who can ignore an enemy at home to fare overseas——"

"Try him, and see," retorted Swain. "You are too ignorant to understand, I suppose, but I will endeavor to convince you. The Norsefolk are not like you savages here in the Sudreyar. They have other interests beside fighting and ravaging. They are become weary of the struggles between the kings, and most of them no longer take the field. For that reason both Ingi and Hakon have fewer housecarls than was once their wont. You are not necessary to Ingi, but he has ample money to pay you well if you——"

The sly look covered Gudrod's face as completely as his beard.

"Perhaps Hakon would pay more," he said.

"Hakon has no wealth. The folk with him are all outlaws—like your people, Gudrod, only they have no ships. They fight for him because no other leader will have them. But he does not pay them, except with whatever plunder they can take."

Gudrod's nostrils quivered.

"Ha, plunder," he exclaimed.

"Yes, there is rich plunder in Norway," said Swain carelessly, "richer far than in the Orkneyar or Scotland."

"Does Ingi take plunder, too?"

"More than Hakon. He has won every fight betwixt them."

"Then why does he not slay Hakon?"

"Because Broadshoulders lurks in the forests of the uplands, and will no longer meet him in arms, and we have not the men to spread a wide enough net in such broken country."

"I have been told that Olvir Rosta is with Hakon," remarked Gudrod, with a keener glance than usual.

The muscles of Swain's face tightened perceptibly, but his voice was as cool as it had been when he answered.

"That is true. Olvir and Sigurd of Reyr are Hakon's wits, between them."

"Olvir is a hard man to beat," suggested Gudrod. "You should know that, Swain."

"I know that he is hard to slay," assented Swain. "As to beating him, did he ever hold his own when I went against him?"

"No," admitted Gudrod. "But you have had little profit of him."

"He is a wolf," said Swain. "What profit could any man have of him?"

"I am a wolf, too," said the Sudreyarman stubbornly. "Some folk must be wolves. That is their luck."

"What you are matters not to me," growled Swain, "so long as you are faithful or do not harm me. But snap at me, wolf, or bite my friends, and I will catch you in a sharp trap and tear out your bowels in your face, and make you eat them."

Gudrod hunched away from the Orkneyman as he had before.

"Hard words," he grumbled.

"And hard gold," added Swain. "That is all you need expect from me or from Ingi, unless you give us cause to think better of you."

"What care I for what you think, or Ingi too?" snarled Gudrod with sudden venom.

"All you need care about is that for honest service Ingi and I will reward you with honest gold—as we will reward dishonest service with a heavy hand and a sharp sword."

"But I shall not be my own master," objected Gudrod. "I shall have to be Ingi's man—and I am a king as well as he."

Swain laughed mockingly.

"You are a mighty king, Gudrod!"

He waved his hand toward the tumbling huts and the little *snekkes* and *skeids*.

"The Orkneyfolk fear me!" flashed Gudrod.

"Because Jarl Harald did not use his head. Had I been with them you would never have ravaged this summer, Gudrod. No, your head would have been on a pole on that *ness* yonder to tell all who passed what fate befell a sea wolf who tried to bite a stronger wolf. For I am a wolf, too!"

Gudrod cowered before Swain's chilly glance.

"Your fame is well known, Swain," he mumbled. "Yes, yes, I know what your enmity means. But here I am my own master, and in Norway——"

"It comes to this, Gudrod," rasped Swain. "Either you come to Norway at a fair price, and fight for Ingi, or I must bide the first snow flurries, and then come hither and root you out."

"I might flee you."

"Where—in those tubs?" Swain pointed a scornful finger at the craft on the strand. "Where you might go I might go with ease. No, no, Gudrod, your folk have no mind to dare the winter storms."

"Well, but if I accepted Ingi's offer, how am I to know it is not a trap, and Jarl Harald is not waiting in Petland Fjord to——"

"First, because I give you my word the offer is honest."

Gudrod spread out his hands in deprecation.

"Oh, yes, you may be honest, Swain, but others, now——"

"And second," Swain went on, unheeding him, "because we shall fare for Norway at once, and I shall be in your company—which I should scarcely do, if I meditated treachery."

Gudrod switched his objections.

"At once?" he clamored. "Why, winter is at hand, Swain! And my folk are not ready. We must settle who will go, and who——"

"I am of a mind to teach you how to handle a fleet in the winter winds," interrupted Swain, smiling grimly. "Heart up, carl! If you lose men in the voyage you shall have fair man-bote for them and *scat* for their gear and ships foundered."

"But so soon! We have not discussed it or agreed what price——"

"Name your price."

Gudrod hesitated, then stipulated a figure he never dreamed would be accepted.

"You shall have it."

"But in advance," he exclaimed eagerly. "I shall have heavy expenses, and my folk who bide here must——"

"A fair sum in advance when you reach Norway, and perhaps a mark or two now," returned Swain. "No, that is all. And remember, if there is trickery——"

He said no more—no more was necessary.

"Oh, you can trust me, Swain," cried Gudrod. "I am a rough fellow, but my word is as good as any king's."

"I shall trust you as far as I must," rejoined Swain. "As for your word, break it and you shall feel my vengeance. Now, speed your messengers to call in your folk. For your own sakes we had best get to sea before the heaviest gales break."

XIX

SWAIN drove into Oslo haven on the wings of a westerly gale, with five and twenty brine-drenched, battered *snekkes* and *skeids* in his wake. Yule was nigh three weeks past, there was cake ice between the rocks in still water and the countryside was blanketed with snow. Gudrod and his folk were like so many cats that had been tumbled in a duck pond, their fur sleeked with the moisture, their very souls frozen with the cold, their tempers strained to breaking. They spat and hissed at one another, half the time with knives drawn; but Swain had only to show his grim face over the poop gunwale of *Deathbringer* to send them scurrying from his sight.

As they reached the sheltered waters off the strand he let *Deathbringer* drop back abeam of Gudrod's ship and hailed the Sudreyar king.

"Here you will anchor," he said shortly. "I go ashore for speech with King Ingi."

"But my men are ship-weary," complained Gudrod. "Surely they may land and stretch the oar kinks out of their muscles."

"You will bide on shipboard until I send word for you to land," answered Swain.

Gudrod scowled.

"That is ill treatment for allies. You might think that we were not to be trusted——"

"Oh, you will be trusted in Oslo," snorted Swain. "For I shall keep my eyes on you, and any Sudreyarman who is caught pilfering our friends or baring a knife without cause I myself will lay by the heels and tear his lungs out from his back."

And the Orkneyman barked an order to the rowers in the waist, and *Deathbringer* forged ahead under the impulse of her sixty oars, coming to anchor in the midst of the little group of King Ingi's ships that still remained in the water—for most of the Norse vessels had been hauled ashore and shedded over to protect them during the winter.

King Ingi, himself, awaited Swain on the landing pier, with Armod at his side; and Swain observed, with a rare trace of uneasiness, the king's pallor, the glum shadow that seemed to veil his brow, the deeper cut lines of pain in his gaunt cheeks, the added stoop to the bent back.

"Ha, Swain," he exclaimed, "you come earlier than you predicted—and not empty-handed, I see."

"I am returned in good season," replied Swain; "and I have brought you fifteen hundred warriors of a sort. Carls, who, as I warned you, will fight for you lustily so long as you pay them and are successful, and desert or betray you the instant fortune swings the other way."

The king's worn face lightened.

"But fifteen hundred! That is luck to quaff mead to! It is well done. This takes a load off my mind."

"How?" asked Swain. "What has gone wrong with you?"

Ingi shook his head, perplexed.

"Nothing has gone wrong as yet. But I——"

He hesitated, and Armod, who had met Swain with his accustomed silent reserve, came to the king's assistance.

"We are concerned over Gregorius," drawled the tall scald. "That is the truth, Swain."

"Concerned!" echoed Swain. "Is he——"

"We do not know where he is," explained Ingi. "I dispatched Oddi some days since to discover his plans and caution him to do nothing rash at least until we had heard from you."

"Humph," growled Swain, "for a man of his rank and wealth Gregorius is very foolish. It is always his way to jump into the first path he comes to. But you have no definite cause for worry? He has not been defeated or——"

"No, he has been successful, on the whole," returned the king. "But he is forever striking here or there; he has an idea in his head that he can trap Hakon, and so end our troubles. But I fear that he is more likely to be trapped himself."

Swain shrugged his shoulders so vigorously that his shield clanged on the back of his mailshirt.

"Bah! It is cold here. Let us go up to your skalli, King, and talk by the fire. This pier is no place for a council."

"Gladly," assented the king, drawing closer about his meager form the fur cloak he wore. "And your folk?"

"My folk can shift for themselves, but I will be thankful if you can provide Gudrod's rovers with a dwelling place which will keep them out of harm's way."

"That will I," cried Ingi. "Here, Snaebiorn—" he summoned one of his chamberlains—"do you go with Erik, Swain's forecastleman, and conduct the Sudreyar folk to my farm of Upsaka on the farther bank of the river. Tell my bailiffs to supply them with all they can eat, and send over any of our folk who are acquainted with the Sudreyar. You may tell Gudrod I will bid him to a feast in my skalli so soon as I have concerted my plans with Swain."

"Be prepared to burn down your skalli the next day," rumbled Swain in his throaty growl. "A dirtier man-beast I never saw—no, not even among the Skraelings when I was in Wineland."

"A sword is a sword," returned the king.

"And fifteen hundred swords may mean the difference between defeat and victory."

"I hope so," said Swain; "but I hope more that we can plan to join Gregorius. It was well enough to divide forces before, but now that he has the itch for fighting—No, no, I like it not!"

"He almost caught Hakon," answered the king.

"'Almost' is no better than failure," jeered Swain. "But how did it fall out?"

"Armod shall tell you," said Ingi, "seeing that he was with Gregorius."

The scald nodded.

"It was a brave venture, Swain, and no fault of Gregorius's that Broadshoulders eluded us; but I am bound to say that the king's worries date from that same venture. It happened in this wise:

"We forayed back and forth from the seaside to the verge of the uplands, and sometimes Hakon slew a few of our folk and again we had the better of him—the advantage was with us most often—and this went on until the snow fell, and both sides sought roofed quarters. There was little doing until a few nights before Yule, when a thrall came into Konungahela, where Gregorius was arranging to celebrate his feast, with word that Hakon and Sigurd of Reyr were to hold their feast at a farm called Saurby which belonged to Munan Ale Uskeynd's son—Ale was a brother on the left hand of King Sigurd, Hakon's father."

"I have heard of him," said Swain, nodding. "An honest carl, by all accounts."

"Yes, deserving of a better fate than Gregorius gave him," agreed Armod. "Well, when Gregorius had the tidings that Hakon was at Saurby he was for going against the place, and with some secrecy we drew together a force of chosen men in a wood on the verge of the uplands, and after all had arrived there we marched by night to Munan's stead. It was well planned. No man saw us. The first Hakon's folk knew of our coming was when our axes battered at their walls."

"And he escaped you?" rasped Swain.

"Yes, but be patient. It was not so simple as we had thought. You see, there were two skallis on the farm, an old one and a new one Munan had built recently. The new one was much the larger, and we reasoned that Hakon would lie within it. So Gregorius and the better part of his folk surrounded it, and left only a few men to guard the lesser one. And by ——, Swain, we had need of all who were with us to contain the carls that poured out of the big skalli. There were Munan, and Asbjorn Jalda, who is as famous a viking as has lived in Norway in my day, yes, and Olvir Rosta."

Swain's nostrils twitched.

"Did Olvir——"

"Oh, there was no trapping the Roysterer! He was the first man out, and albeit he lacked his mail, he hewed through our shieldwall in a weak spot and was away into the woods, with never a thought for his comrades. But some one had put torches to the roof by now, and the men inside were busy helping out the women, and what with the confusion——"

"Gregorius is not the man to take Olvir," said Swain gruffly. "That you need not explain to me. Well?"

"The rest, so far as we were concerned, was slaughter. Gregorius wished to give Munan peace, but Munan insisted upon trying to help some men who were hemmed in a loft by the flames, and two of our common men slew him. Asbjorn won clear of us, but was struck down as he fled. And one way or another, there must have died with them a score and a half or two score more.

"It was while we were occupied with these carls, and trying to distinguish the women from the men by the starlight and the rising flames from the thatch, that our folk by the other skalli raised a howl for aid. 'Here is Hakon!' they cried. And, ''Ware Sigurd!' 'Help, Gregorius! We are overborne.' "

"I would have overborne them with my blade," snapped Swain. "Did Hakon——"

"He was clean away before we might stop him, and Sigurd, too. It seems that they and a good half of their company had lain in the smaller building. They were full as numerous as those we had set to ring them in, and better warriors, withal. They slew a dozen of our folk, and made off into the forest after Olvir."

"That is not a deed Gregorius has cause to be proud of," said Swain. "He is too impetuous."

"Ah, but you have not heard the worst" Ingi broke in. "Hakon and Sigurd were very wroth for the death of Munan and the

others, and the week after they fell upon Haldor Brynjolf's son's farm of Vettaland, wherein lay Haldor and many of his kinsmen. Haldor's folk had been drinking deep in the feasting, and they made no defense worth speaking of. Haldor was slain, and twenty of his friends and kin, and their women turned out into the forest in their shifts—'as Gregorius served Munan's women,' quoth Hakon."

"So Haldor is dead," exclaimed Swain. "Humph, I can not weep for that. He and Simon Skalp have been the cause of too many of our troubles."

"And have stood friends to us in our need," the king reminded him. "We must credit them what they deserve."

"We must," admitted Swain briefly. "But I can not see that Haldor's death has ruined us. Here you have told me of two aimless skalli burnings, and would have me dread——"

"No, no," interrupted the king, "It is not the two fights, in themselves, have worried me. Man for man we slew more than Hakon. My trouble was brought about by the rage which possessed Gregorius because of Haldor's slaying. He took it as a personal affront, and nothing would serve him but to muster what folk he could reach and march out to hunt Hakon down."

"He said, 'Haldor was my man, and it is for me to avenge him,'" added Armod. "I did what I could to restrain him, Swain, advising him to await your return. But he would not heed me. 'I shall deserve men's laughter if I always await Swain's aid,' he said. So I rode to Oslo at speed to tell the king what was toward, and learned if word was come from you."

Swain scowled bleakly.

"I am come in a good hour—if it be not too late," he grunted. "This was what I feared would happen. Gregorius was never one to listen willingly to reason." He turned to the king. "And so you sent off Oddi to attempt what Armod failed in?"

Ingi twisted his hands nervously in and out of the belt of his fur robe.

"What else could I do, Swain? I dared not leave Oslo, myself. You might come any day. If I abandoned the town Hakon might seize it. And if Gregorius had not listened to Armod before, I thought he might heed Oddi, speaking in my name."

Swain nodded unwillingly.

"You did right. There was no other course. Who can stay the man who is fey? But hark! What is that?"

They had entered the snowy streets of the little town, groups of the townfolk and of Ingi's Courtmen and housecarls staring curiously at Swain's huge figure beside the king's misshapen form. And of a sudden there rang in their ears the abrupt, staccato rattle of horse's hoofs galloping hard on the frosty ground.

"One rides in haste," said the king wonderingly.

"I begin to believe I am too late," growled Swain.

XX

THEY had reached the open space in front of the king's skalli, the rattling hoofs echoing louder and louder with every ell they traversed at Ingi's limping footpace, when a big roan horse galloped around a corner, and was dragged to a halt by the little man who was perched high in the saddle.

"Oddi!" gasped Armod.

The king said nothing, moistening his lips as does a man who fears the unknown. Swain, also silent, fixed glowering eyes on the little scald.

Oddi rocked in the saddle for a moment, then scrambled to the ground, and would have fallen, but for Swain's supporting arm.

"The cold!" he chattered. "Ah, my legs are dead."

And then he realized for the first time who had caught him.

"You, Swain! Ah, you come too late. Gregorius is dead, too—dead as my legs—on Befia ice."

"By the old gods!" swore Swain.

"Oh, holy Olaf!" groaned the king.

Armod alone thought of Oddi, his lifelong friend and rival in scaldcraft.

"But yourself, little man?" questioned the tall scald. "Are you whole?"

Oddi grinned feebly.

"I think so. Yes, I have no wounds on me, if that is your meaning. But my legs! By ——, I shall never ride horse again!"

Swain tossed him over one shoulder as easily as if he had been a cornsack.

"A cup of hot ale will melt your joints," said the Orkneyman. "Come, we must not talk of this in the street. Let us go within. 'Bad news can wait,' the thrall said, when his master would beat him."

The king and Armod followed him silently into the firelit darkness of the skalli hall, and after them streamed a widening trickle of men as the report spread through the town streets that Oddi the Little had ridden in with news—some said ill news, some said good—from Gregorius Dag's son. But they had their curiosity for their pains. Swain continued through the hall, and into the inner chamber wherein the king slept, plucking a kitchen varlet by the ear in passing, with a harsh command to fetch food and heated ale for the messenger as soon as it could be prepared.

In the king's room he lowered Oddi to the wide, cushioned chair Ingi was wont to occupy.

"There!" he grunted. "You have earned your comfort, little scald. Is the door fast, Armod? Good! Now, tell us what you know, Oddi. Tell all!"

Oddi crumpled on the cushion, haggard-eyed, his gnarled, brown features distorted by the agony of sorry thoughts. The stimulation of the excitement of reaching his journey's end had left him. He collapsed like a pricked sheep's bladder.

"Oh, blessed saints!" he moaned. "I would that I could tell you anything but what I must. Evil luck we have had, Lord King. Ah, who would have looked for such an issue? For it was no man's fault. It seemed we could not fail. I believed it, myself. Hakon's folk were so few."

"Begin at the beginning," said Swain with unusual gentleness. "Tell us what befell from the day you reached Gregorius with the king's message. But wait!" As a knock rapped on the door. "Here are your ale and meat. Take them in, Armod."

And when Armod had done so and reshut the door, Swain raised the steaming flagon of ale to Oddi's lips, helping him to drink.

"Aaa-aa-aahh!" sighed the little scald. "I begin to feel blood in my legs. And I can make my tongue speak as I would have it. Be patient with me, and I will tell my tale."

He shut his eyes for a moment.

"What a saga this will make, Armod. Gods! What a tale! But you await me. Well, I will begin.

"I came to Konungahela the tenth day after Yule, and delivered my message as you had given it to me, Lord King. Gregorius replied that it was all very well for you to counsel caution, but you were not at hand and did not know what he knew. He also repeated what he had said to Armod, that he could not always await Swain's aid.

" 'Furthermore,' he said, 'it is likely that if I waited I should miss what promises to be an excellent chance to make away with Hakon. I have word from a trustworthy source that many of his folk have wearied of the hiding-out and cold work of traveling in winter, and that he is left with no more than a handful of followers. My spies have discovered where he lurks in a stead beyond the Befia river, and I believe that by quick marching I can assail him there before he will be able to fly, more especially as he is loath to take to the woods at this season, if he can avoid it.'

"I argued with him at length, but it was to no purpose. The end of it was that we left Konungahela under cover of the night, and we came to Fors the thirteenth day after Yule, where we stayed the night. The day after that we pressed on to the Befia River, and all Gregorius's folk in our company, a considerable company. On the opposite bank we saw steel gleaming, and a *bondi* of the neighborhood told us it was Hakon's spears.

"The weather was very bitter; there was ice on the river, and on the ice there was snow; the light was dull and gray—gray like the flash of a sword in firelight. Gregorius looked at the river, and asked the *bondi* if there was not a bridge to the other side.

" 'For that ice looks unsound to me,' he said.

"Ah, and it did to me, too, Lord King!

"But the *bondi* laughed, and so did other folk who came from the country between Fors and the Befia.

" 'There is a bridge upstream, Gregorius,' they answered; 'but it is a long way. By the time you reached it Hakon might have escaped into the forest. Go over the ice; the river is not deep.'

"But still Gregorius hesitated—and do you remember that, Swain, when you charge him with rashness."

"If he was cautious once he was rash twice," growled Swain. "*I* know Gregorius, little scald. Go on!"

"He was as cautious as yourself, Swain," reiterated Oddi stubbornly.

" 'That is snow ice,' he replied to the Befiafolk. 'Well I know the look of it. It will never bear a man's weight.'

"'What difference if it does not?' returned that troll of a *bondi*. 'You can not drown. It is not like you to fear to cross a narrow band of weak ice to attack a handful of enemies one half as numerous as your own people, Gregorius.'

"Now, at that Gregorius became angry.

"'I will show you who is afraid, carl!' he cried. 'Bring forward my banner, housecarls. Follow me, all of you. We will make a quick end of Hakon this time.'

"We all went forward, then. Gregorius was in the lead, and with him were Grim Riki's son, his banner bearer, and a score of his own housecarls. The rest of us were close on his heels. We passed easily over the ice inshore, and it bore us up without cracking, but as Gregorius reached the middle of the stream he plunged through the snow—and Grim and others with him. There was no cracking sound, only the splash of the water and their cries."

King Ingi groaned and buried his face in his hands. Swain sat motionless, tight-lipped, his eyes sparking cold fire as they stabbed at Oddi's drawn features. Armod's gaze was fixed on the room wall as if he was looking through the tapestry and planking at the very scene Oddi described.

"We found out afterward," continued Oddi, "that Hakon had received warning of our coming, and his folk had slashed a gap in the ice with axes and then heaped snow on the open water. But as the *bondi* had said, the water was not more than waist deep and Gregorius was up at once and calling to those of us behind him to go back.

"'We can smash our way to the thick ice by the shore,' he said.

"But Hakon's company were not asleep. So soon as they perceived his mishap they ran down to the water's edge, and commenced to rain arrows and spears at the men in the water. Gregorius—" Oddi's voice choked—"turned to cover Grim with his shield because the banner bearer had to use both hands to grip the banner staff, and—and—and" the scald's voice became so low that it was scarce above a whisper—"an arrow smote him in the throat just over the collar of his mailshirt. He sank without a cry."

The silence became unbearable.

"Did you leave him?" asked Swain drily.

Oddi flushed.

"Ten men died to fetch him ashore, Swain. We could not do more."

"And what of Hakon?"

"The heart was clean gone out of our folk. Some of us would have them run up to the bridge or try the ice elsewhere, but we could not muster a score to go with us, and more men were rallying to Hakon every moment. We were fortunate to escape without greater manscathe."

"So Hakon is free and stronger than ever," commented Swain harshly.

"What could we do?" exclaimed Oddi. "If you had been there, perhaps, we might—"

"It is a fact that things often go wrong when I am not at hand to curb the light-minded," growled Swain. "But it was no fault of yours, Oddi."

Ingi dropped the hands that had been unable to stay the rush of his tears.

"No, Swain," he exclaimed the crippled king. "It was not Oddi's fault, nor was it Gregorius's fault. It was mine!"

Swain simply looked at him.

"Yes, mine!" cried Ingi. "I wanted to go to Gregorius when I first heard of Haldor's death, for I knew what it must mean to him. And if I had gone I am confident that he would have acted with greater caution—or else he and I would be sharing the one lodging in an earthen bed. But I was not man enough—yes, or king enough—to go upon my own responsibility. I must bide and see what Swain would counsel! Bah, I am sick of myself, of this half king's part I play.

"To Gregorius I owe what I am. He was my friend, faithful, unselfish. And he is gone, slain like a dog by treachery, with cowards by him who dared not punish his murderers. Well, I am one who remembers his friendship, and I take oath that I will go forth at the earliest possible day and push shields with Hakon until one or two things happen: Either I shall come to my death or I shall walk over Hakon and his people. For it would not be sufficient to avenge a man like Gregorius even though all those who had a hand in his death paid for it with their lives. He was worth all of them, and many more!"

Again there was a period of strained silence.

"I do not think it was your purpose, Lord King, to charge that Oddi was a coward," said Armod at last.

The king drew a groping hand across his lined forehead.

"No—no—Oddi is no coward. A brave comrade—the little scald."

"What is your plan, King?" asked Swain, then.

"Plan?" repeated Ingi dully. "Plan? Why—why, I will go forth against Hakon and seek him wherever he——"

Swain laughed curtly. It was like a shower of cold water in that heated atmosphere.

"I do not think you will have to seek after him," said the Orkneyman, "for it is my guess that Hakon will come to seek you."

"How?" questioned Ingi, still dazed.

"The glove is on the other hand, King. The advantage has been reversed. Hakon has slain the greatest *lenderman* in Norway, now that Erling is dead to card his wife's wool, the greatest friend you had in the land. Those who have hated us or feared us will now cast off all restraint. Instead of hunting, we shall be the hunted.

We must fight, whether we win or lose.

"Let us fight," answered the king eagerly. "I am for fighting. I would rather die in a shieldwall than live a king without a throne."

"For myself," growled Swain, "I intend to live, whatever betides this land."

XXI

GUDROD squinted cunningly at Swain and King Ingi as he put down his mead-cup

"Yes, that was what Swain said should be paid," he whined; "but things have changed with your folk since then. Here is Gregorius Dag's son, slain, and his following dispersed and——"

"It is not true that Gregorius' following have dispersed," growled Swain. "They have been coming into us day by day, as you must know. Simon Skalp and all the Vikenmen are with us, and a great company besides."

"But not all of them," the Sudreyar king persisted stubbornly. "It is common talk in the town that you have not half the number of folk you led hither in the summer."

"What of it?" rasped Swain. "Erling Skakki will soon be here—albeit without him I fear not to meet Hakon's rabble."

"Your foreboding is not without excuse, King Gudrod," interposed Ingi courteously, "yet Swain speaks the truth. We sent Armod the Scald to Erling the day after we had tidings of Gregorius' death. We have likewise a notable troop of warriors here in Oslo, and it is not likely that Hakon will be able to withstand us, seeing that whenever we have encountered him we have had the best of it, whatever the odds against us."

Gudrod's yellow teeth showed in a snarling grimace.

"Words, King, words!" he sneered. "I sold my aid for gold. Gold I must have."

"Gold you have had," answered Ingi. "And more has been promised. But I am not close-fisted, Gudrod, and if——"

"Give him no more now, King," snapped Swain. "I know his breed! Yield once to his demands, and he would come running every day."

"It is only fair that I should be paid more," exclaimed Gudrod savagely. "When I accepted your terms, Swain, I did not expect that my folk would be nigh one half of Ingi's host."

Weary of bickering, the crippled king turned again to Swain.

"There is something in his argument. What say you if we——"

Swain's mighty fist thudded on the table with a crash that set the mead cups dancing.

"I say no! He has a fair price. By the Old Gods, Gudrod, you have at this moment more gold than you ever held in your two hands before, and you must be satisfied with it. Do your duty and stand loyally by us, though, and I will advise the king to increase the payment which is still due you."

"That is fair," assented Ingi. "Yes, I will agree to a suitable increase—after you have swung swords for me."

"Who knows when that will be?" grumbled Gudrod. "We have been here a many days, and never a chance at plunder. Men say you are not anxious to meet Hakon."

Ingi leaned forward across the table, eyes blazing in his pale face.

"They who say that lie! I have sworn to meet Hakon. My one concern is that I must wait."

"Bide, bide," rumbled Swain dispassionately. "Waiting hurts no man. As for Hakon, he will arrange the meeting for us, if we give him time."

"Time!" protested the king, forgetting

the presence of the Sudreyarman, who blinked amazedly at this exhibition of a sentiment beyond his understanding. "Too much time we have allowed to pass without slaying a man of those who slew Gregorius."

Swain dropped a kindly hand upon Ingi's twisted shoulder.

"There will be a red slaying come out of this, King, be sure of that," said the Orkneyman. "Better our time than Hakon's, if the luck falls to us. But we have other matters to discuss."

He rounded briskly upon Gudrod.

"You have your answer," he said curtly. "I am a man who makes a promise, and stands by it. So much I offered; so much you shall receive—with a fair addition for aid rendered, considering that the task we are set is harder than we had looked for. But if I hear another demand for more gold I will cut off somewhat of the amount first agreed upon between us. And let me hear no complaints of your folk prowling outside the bounds set them. Remember, I told you what punishment I should apply to those who turned thieves or brawlers in the town."

Gudrod moistened his lips as he rose, disconcerted, abashed, resentful, but cowed for the present by Swain's gruff authority.

"My folk have been peaceful enough—outside of their own company," he muttered. "There is no need to threaten."

"I have not threatened," returned Swain. "I have warned you. When I threaten I act. See to it, also, that your men do not slay each other. King Ingi has paid minted gold for each of your followers. They have a value to us."

"Oh, we shall have our swords out when the war horns blow," answered Gudrod, with an attempt at a swagger. "If you bring as many as I into the fray——"

A horn blew outside, and he broke off short, gaping at his companions. Swain and the king were equally surprized. Voices shouted, a door crashed to and Erik Skallagrim's son ran into the hall.

"Men say that Erling's company are even now riding into the town," cried the Icelander.

"Good news, at last," exclaimed Ingi.

Swain simply crooked his finger at Erik.

"Gudrod returns to his own folk," quoth the Orkneyman. "See him forth of the skalli."

The Sudreyar king started to step down from the dais, but when he had gained the floor rushes he paused and turned back.

"I go now," he snarled angrily. "But when you come to order your men for battle see that you take me into your council. For I will not fight blindfolded, for any man or for any sum of gold."

And he stamped from the hall ahead of Erik.

"Is it wise to dismiss him thus, Swain?" asked Ingi. "If he is not much of a friend, still he is better as a friend than an enemy."

"He will never be a friend to rely on," replied Swain carelessly. "His kind must be kept with the knife edge close to their throats. Bah! Would you receive Erling, upon whose coming so much depends, in the company of that foul beast?"

A hint of color glowed in Ingi's cheeks.

"It will be good to see Erling! By ——, Swain, with him we shall be our old selves again. Two of us are——"

Erik stumbled into the hall alone, and stood inside the door way, a look of bewilderment on his gnarled hazelnut of a face.

"It is not Erling," he gasped.

"Not Erling!" exclaimed the king. "But who——"

"Lord, it is the Princess Kristin. I know only that. She is entering the courtyard this instant."

A sharp crackling sound jarred on the silence that was punctuated by the purring of the fires on the long hearth. Swain had crushed an ale horn in the fingers of one hand.

"Here is a mare wants bridling," he grunted. "It might well be said that the good luck does not come our way, king."

"Who can say?" the king answered dully. "Fetch her hither, Erik. She may come in advance of Erling. But hark! What are those horns?"

The rumbling growl of the *ludr*-horns was lifted from all the quarters of the little town, blast answering blast, the echoes dying away in the distance, only to be caught up and flung broadcast again and again.

Swain leaped from his seat.

"They mean but one thing—battle! Ho, Erik!"

But the hall door slammed again, and Oddi the Little appeared beside the forecastleman.

"Halfdan Kimbe's son has seen Hakon and all his array passing through the wood

beyond the river! They are planning to fall upon us before daybreak in the morning, Swain. And Kristin Sigurd's daughter is dismounting in the skalli yard. Her folk say that Erling is in Bergen."

King Ingi said nothing. Like Swain he had risen from his seat, and his misshapen body seemed to quiver with repressed energy the while a light of resolution bathed his weary face.

Swain tossed from him the fragments of the ale horn he had crushed.

"As much use to us tonight as those bits of horn is Erling Skakki," he commented bitterly. "Wrynecked? No, no, it shall be said hereafter that Erling is wry in his wits! To send his wife to answer an appeal from men who fought his own battle! By the Hammer, it passes belief!"

"But here is no cause for despondence," remonstrated the king. "If Erling is not come, his shall be the loss. We should be cheered, Swain, that the waiting is ended, and the enemy have dared to try our mettle."

"It is my belief that we shall be required to exhibit daring above Hakon's folk," rejoined Swain. "Well, shall we ask Kristin what task Erling sets himself in his bower-work?"

"We must speak with her," agreed the king. "But bear in mind that she is my cousin as well as Erling's wife. Be not too rough with her, Swain."

"I rough!" mocked Swain. "Was I ever known to act so! Hutatut, King! I will not swing her by the hair, however she deserves it. But do you bear in mind, yourself—you who waxed restless against time a few moments past—that our time now grows scant. We have a shieldwall to order, and certain measures to devise. If Kristin brings only smooth words—ha, she saves us the trouble. Stand aside, Oddi, Erik, the princess enters."

Kristin swept into the dim-lit hall with something of the haughtiness which was her ordinary humor; but mingled with it was a baffled uneasiness—product of the bellowing war horns that had greeted her entry, and the stirring and trampling of armored men in the snow-drifted streets.

She was alone, save for Armod, whose look denoted the disgust he felt for the result of his errand. It was the tall scald who spoke first.

"I am returned from my mission, Lord King," he said shortly. "Erling, for reasons which the Princess Kristin will set forth, did not see fit to come with me."

"In that Erling did not see fit to come I am more sorry for him than for ourselves," replied the king gently, "seeing that he is thereby likely to miss a most honorable encounter. We should have been pleased to enjoy his company and aid, cousin, but without him we shall endeavor to conduct ourselves in such a way as not to forfeit his esteem of us."

Kristin stared at him, scarce understanding his words. And indeed, there was that about Ingi which puzzled Swain, too, an assured poise, a high aloofness, which drew a spiritual veil over the distortions of his poor body. He not only seemed to stand more erect, but to grow in stature and physical force.

"But surely, Lord King, you will not thrust yourself into the fighting!" she exclaimed. "Why should you risk yourself ——"

"I am sure that if I had fallen in battle," answered Ingi as gently as before, "and Gregorius was alive, he would not lie concealed when the battle was joined. I can not do less than he."

"Gregorius owed his death to his own foolishness, if what I hear be true," she snapped. "There is no obligation upon you by reason of it."

"I must disagee with you," objected Ingi. "I am under an obligation to avenge Gregorius' death. He was slain in the endeavor to slay the man who is trying to deprive me of my throne. And I have every confidence that if God is on my side I shall happily procure the slaying of Hakon and those others who were the bane of him."

"It is my counsel that you do not fight at all, or any of your folk," she persisted. "Return with me to Bergen, and Erling will have raised up the *boendr* thereabouts for you, and then if Hakon——"

"This is not the cross-bench, woman, but a warriors' counsel!" roared Swain. "Erik, take her to the bower."

But the king stayed Erik with a gesture.

"She means no harm, Swain," he said. "Doubtless, she speaks Erling's message."

"Of what use is Erling's message, now?" growled Swain. "Our carls are already in their mail. The shieldwall is forming. What we require is strong arms, not words slippery from a woman's tongue."

Kristin had flushed scarlet when Swain first spoke.

"As to tongues, Swain," she said, "many men have called your's a rough one, and it is certain that they did you no injustice thereby. You have been a trouble-maker ever since you came into Norway."

"Did Erling bid you say that?" challenged Swain.

"No, my own wit——"

"I am glad that you have no authority from him for that," commented Swain drily. "It was Erling who persuaded me hither in the beginning of these wars. But that is of no moment today. Tell us what excuse he makes to save his manhood, and we will be gone to do his work for him."

She opened her mouth to retort to him, but there was that about the Orkneyman's cold rage which shriveled the spirit within her. Few men had outfaced Swain's wrath —and lived.

"Am I to stand here in your hall, Ingi, and be insulted by your courtmen?" she cried, sobbing. "I, who am a king's daughter! It is not to your credit."

Swain took the answer from the king's lips.

"Nor is it to Erling's credit that he bides safe in Bergen, instead of coming hither as we asked him to. Does he think it will further his son's cause to have Ingi defeated? Does he think men will acclaim his bravery when he lets us stand unaided between himself and Hakon's ax?"

Kristin recovered her self-command by an effort.

"He thinks he would be foolish to entrust himself to the Vikenfolk after they tried to slay him in Bergen!" she spat resentfully. "He thinks there can be no safety for him at Ingi's court so long as Simon Skalp and other traitors and enemies of his find a welcome at it!"

"Ho," sneered Swain. "So he fears Simon! Scalds, remember these words. What else does he fear—I mean think, woman?"

But the king spoke for her.

"I am sorry that you feel so bitter toward your old comrade, Swain," said Ingi. "And it is not well for you to taunt Kristin. If she is mistaken, she is nonetheless honest in her purposes. It is unfortunate that Erling has not come, but if God wills it so what cause have we to complain?"

"It is not my custom to leave the responsibility to any god," snorted Swain. "Let us have whatever message Erling sent, and go. There is work for us to do."

"Yes, yes, speak out Kristin," said the king.

She gulped and strove hard to recover a trace of the haughtiness with which she had entered the hall.

"Erling sends you both warm greeting," she said, in a low, hurried voice. "His first thought was to come to you with any men he could raise, but afterward he thought more deliberately——"

"Say, rather, you thought!" jeered Swain.

"Lord King!" she appealed.

"Let her speak, Swain," urged Ingi.

"Gladly," assented Swain. "But let her first answer my question. Did you advise Erling not to come, woman?"

"I did," she flared. "He is too soft-hearted. His one plan was to reach the king's side, and share the king's perils. He said that he owed it to Swain, too, to be with him in any close bicker. And then I asked him if he was a fool, and bade him recall that our son's fortune was at stake, and that——"

"I have heard enough," interrupted Swain. "It will not be your doing, Kristin, if that son of your's amounts to anything. No mother ever did more to ruin a child's future."

He leaped down the dais and started to walk toward the door.

"Bide, Swain," called Ingi. "She has not finished."

"I know the rest of her message—which is *her* message, in sober truth," growled Swain. "What use to listen to it? Erling refused to come when we needed him. Now, we must fight without him. In Thor's name, let us have an end of talk, and try steel!"

Kristin was seized by a sudden panic.

"But why must you fight?" she argued. "The road to Bergen is open. Go there, and we will soon have a host——"

It was the king who interrupted her this time.

"Perhaps you do not understand," he said in his peculiarly gentle tones. "But Hakon is approaching Oslo. Before day dawns he will be here. It would be highly dishonorable to me did I flee from him under such circumstances, and no true friend would advise me to do so. I should be a fugitive king, and all men know what happened to my brother Eystein when he

forgot his dignity and fled from us. If people turned so entirely against Eystein, what would they say of me, who am a cripple, and of little avail in the shield-pushing?"

"What does it matter if men talk, so long as you live?" she tried again. "Men are forever talking—and little good it brings them!"

"Ah, you do not understand," repeated Ingi, smiling. "As it happens, what men say of a king is very important to him. Sometimes men's talk can make or unmake a king. And a king is better dead than disgraced, for he is not like a common man who can flee defeat without hurt to his reputation. A king disgraced is no longer a king. He is not even a common man; he is less than nothing."

Swain reached a knotted fist across the table and seized Ingi's hand in a bear's grip.

"Well said!" exclaimed the Orkneyman gruffly. "A king who can feel as you do has not wasted his life. Heart up, Ingi! I am going to muster our carls. When you are ready come after me."

Half way to the door he called over his shoulder:

"This is not the end of the road. And though we serve the ravens at a disadvantage, men will acclaim our deeds the more heartily in consequence."

Erik and the two scalds followed him, and as they passed out Kristin wrung her hands in despair.

"It is unthinkable that you should give battle to Hakon here," she groaned. "Why, Armod told us nigh a half of your men were Gudrod's Sudreyar folk, who will never stand a stout push!"

"If God wills it, they will stand," replied Ingi, fastening his cloak at the neck. "And now I will beg that you make yourself comfortable. You must be spent from your journey, and——"

"No, no," she gasped. "I am not spent. I must go away at once. Erling must know what is toward, and I—I—This town is no place for a woman, if, if——"

"You concern yourself needlessly," Ingi reassured her. "Be guided by me, and remain here. Yes, I insist! You have nothing to fear. Hakon is an honest youth, and a brave, as I am bound to admit. Furthermore, I have a favor to ask of you, which requires your presence in the town."

"What is it?" she asked in a stricken whisper.

He laughed happily.

"It is little of itself, yet important to me. Look you, cousin, if all goes well with us, as I hope, you shall be able to rejoice in our victory. But if we lose, my friends might have difficulty in securing permission for the removal of my body——"

She swayed on her feet in a great gust of terror.

"But you need not die!" she stammered. "Even though Hakon wins, you——"

"I shall be victor or corpse tomorrow," replied Ingi quietly. "My fortunes have reached a pitch where I must win all or lose all. Too often has my luck tipped this way and that way. I have had of it all I have a right to require. Therefore do as I bid you, and if Hakon rides into the town tomorrow go to him, as his cousin and Sigurd Jorsalafarer's daughter, and ask of him leave to bestow my body in holy ground."

Kristin nodded; words were beyond her.

"Tell Erling when you see him that I always loved him as much as Gregorius," added the king. "Christ keep you, cousin!"

He hobbled from the room, his twisted foot dragging through the floor rushes. A door slammed behind him, another—and Kristin heard the clatter of arms as his guards saluted him in the courtyard.

She sank to her knees by the dais.

"Oh, blessed saints," she prayed, "oh, Holy Mother, what have I done? What have I done?"

XXII

THE column wound across the snow like a great silver sea snake, helms and spear points aglint in the moon light. The night was very calm, with a clear, crisp cold. Overhead the sky was a purple vault; the houses of Oslo were a blotch of shadow by the shining streak the river, with here and there a prickle of candleflame.

Crunch-crunch went the feet in the snow, sword hilts jingle-jangling on armored thighs, shields clattering on mailed backs. A faint, steamy cloud overhung the marchers, and voices murmured in a hoarse monotone, except midway of the line where the Sudreyarfolk chattered with shrill vehemence.

Swain stood by the last house telling off

the different companies as they emerged from their quarters.

"So!" he exclaimed with satisfaction when finally only Erik was left beside him. "I make it upward of four thousand, carl, counting Gudrod's folk as fifteen hundred."

The forecastleman nodded.

"A scant four thousand. Well, it might be worse. We had longer odds against us in the fight on the piers. But who is this?"

A lone man was running from the town, cloak fluttering behind him, while from one hand depended a round, dark object that dribbled on the snow like an overfull kettle.

"Whoever he is, he overslept," grunted Swain. "Ho, it is Simon Skalp! And as the Vikenman slowed to a walk on seeing them, he hailed—

"It is a good thing that you waked in time, Simon."

Simon's bony face was contorted into a horrible smile.

"It is," he agreed. "Else I might not have chanced upon this fellow."

He lifted the object Swain had taken for a pot—and they saw it to be a freshly-severed head. The staring eyes and clinched teeth seemed to grin acknowledgement of Simon's mirth.

"Who is he?" asked Swain. "I do not recall him."

"Gutlaf, a thrall of Sigurd of Reyr. I have often seen him in the past."

"And you found him in the town?"

"I saw him dodging between the house-walls a few breaths since. It was just after the Sudreyarfolk had crossed the ice."

Swain and Erik exchanged a quick glance of apprehension, which Simon intercepted.

"It may be," he said in answer to their unspoken question. "Who can say? Be certain, in any case, that Gutlaf was up to no good in Oslo. A spy he was, at the least."

"Did he talk?" demanded Swain.

"No, he fought. I had to kill him to defend myself."

Swain pondered, chin sunk on his mailed chest.

"Will you go to Gudrod?" queried Erik presently.

"What use?" returned Swain. "What could we charge him with? No, cast the head in the ditch there, Simon—and forget it, if you can. As the king, himself, has said, we win or we lose tonight—and this broil is become so tangled that no man can be sure of the issue."

Simon tossed the head away, and it rolled chin over crown until it came to rest against a drift and teetered there as if the body it had belonged to was buried from sight beneath. Simon and Erik crossed themselves involuntarily. Swain frowned.

"It has an ill look," said Erik. "It—almost it might still have life."

"Bah," rasped Swain. "Did you never see a death grin before?"

"Nevertheless, I think that Erik is right," spoke up Simon. "I have a feeling that it has overlooked me." *

"You concern yourselves over nothing," said Swain impatiently. "And see that you do not communicate what you have seen to other folk. We have a sufficiently hard task, as it is, without frightening men with old wives' tales."

"That there is no gainsaying," snarled Simon.

The Vikenman's gaunt head took on the bare lines of a skull in the glimmer of the moonlight.

"I do not seek to decry your part, Swain," he went on. "Yet I would remind you that this fight means life or death for me, as well as for Ingi. But you can always seek a haven from Hakon's wrath in the Orkneyar."

"The more reason that you should not be put out by the way a man's head falls on the snow," answered Swain.

"If I am disturbed," returned Simon, "you will still bear witness that I have not lost my courage thereby, albeit we who were Gregorius' friends have little cause to be cheerful."

"I will bear witness to whatever you do," said Swain shortly. "As to Gregorius' friendship for you, it might be said that it proved more expensive than profitable to him."

Simon made no answer to this remark, and they trudged on in silence after the column. In after years Erik Skallagrim's son was wont to describe Swain's meeting with Simon on the outskirts of Oslo, and when he had concluded his tale he would say:

"So it happened. Now, who can say whether Simon had forelooked his future or had waked with a stomach soured by overmuch ale?"

On a hillock by the river the column halted, and King Ingi and a few of the

*Bewitched him, put the evil eye upon him.

chiefs went forward to meet the men who had been sent out in advance to discover the disposition of their enemies. These men reported that Hakon's host were marching over the ice, which lay all the way from the town to Hofud Isle, and that they would come up very soon.

"Are they more numerous than we?" asked the king, sitting his horse in the midst of the chiefs.

"They are very many more, Lord King," replied the watchers; "but it is our judgement that the most of them are not so well armed."

"Better that way than the reverse," said the king. "We have been outnumbered by them in other affairs, and always gave them cause to know that a few stout carls who held together were superior to any rabble."

"Yes," assented Swain. "A small host, who are used to acting in company, can defeat a loose array of folk-levies."

The Orkneyman swept his fierce eyes over the faces of the chiefs.

"Does any man doubt that we should meet them here?" he challenged.

Man after man shook his head or muttered his readiness for battle, and the most eager of all was Gudrod.

"Too long we have lain idle," exclaimed the Sudreyar king. "It is time to wash the rust off our swords. My folk are hungry for the slaughter."

"Humph," growled Swain. "This will be no viking foray against sleeping farmsteads, Gudrod. He is a fool who thinks Hakon will run at the first clink of steel."

"He will not stand to the rush of my company," boasted Gudrod. "None shall stay me."

"You shall not find me ungrateful or my service unprofitable," promised Ingi. "Where shall we station King Gudrod, Swain?"

Before Swain could speak Simon Skalp interposed.

"How if we dispersed the Sudreyarmen among our companies, Lord King?"

Gudrod spat with rage, and Simon hastened on——

"They are not used to fighting in a shield-wall, as we do, and perhaps——"

Gudrod slammed his shield down upon the snow.

"I am a king, and I shall say how my folk fight!" he shouted.

"Peace, peace," pleaded Ingi. "It is well known that you are a king, Gudrod, and be sure that you shall——"

"Simon spoke without thinking," said Swain curtly. "No folk fight well when they are mixed with strangers, not Simon's carls nor mine. Let Gudrod hold his Sudreyarmen together, and be responsible for what they do."

Simon shrugged his shoulders, and Gudrod simmered to an angry silence

"It is my belief that Swain has the right of it," said Ingi. "And I suggest that Gudrod and his folk be appointed to hold our right wing. You, Simon, and the Vikenfolk shall be the left wing, and I will rear my banner in the center, with Swain to assist me."

There was some discussion of this, but in the end the king's plan prevailed, and it was agreed that the host should form in line five men deep across the river ice, in order to intercept Hakon as he approached. They had barely concluded the necessary arrangements when a black mass appeared in the distance, and began to spread out upon the ice, with a rattle and glitter of arms and a low clamor of voices.

King Ingi dismounted from his horse, took his shield from an attendant, and limped up beside Hal Audun's son, who was his banner bearer.

"Surely, you will not place yourself in such a dangerous situation, Lord King," objected Hal.

"I intend to do all that I can to win this battle," replied the king firmly, "and it is necessary that I should share the risks with the rest of you."

When other chiefs would have added their voices to Hal's he waved them away.

"It is too late for argument," he said. "Hakon's folk are coming toward us."

"Let be, let be," advised Swain roughly. "You have a brave king, and should encourage him in his hardihood. He ventures all he has on this throw, and therein he reveals a wise perception of what is honcrable and necessary. One king or the other dies here on the ice."

"That is my thought, too," said Ingi. "Sound the horns and raise the war shout that the enemy may know we are not dismayed."

The chiefs dispersed to their posts without mcre talk, and the *ludr*-horns rumbled from end to end of the line and Ingi's folk

added their voices to the thunder of the horns. An answering roar came from Hakon's array, which was deeper than Ingi's, and the attackers began to march forward in very disorderly fashion, for their shields did not lap, and if a man was dissatisfied with his position he pushed himself forward or dropped back, whichever pleased him.

Swain saw this, and his eyes shone with sudden hope.

"Ha," he said. "Hakon has learned little since we last met him. This is a march of farmfolk. Be guided by me, king, and give the word for our line to charge."

"Gladly, Swain," agreed Ingi.

And his host responded in very good order on the left, where Simon Skalp commanded, and in the center. But the right wing, composed of the Sudreyarmen, began to incline away from the center, and some of Ingi's folk raised a shout to call attention to it.

"Here is a gap," they cried. "Ho, Swain, call Gudrod into line!" "The Sudreyarfolk are leaving us!" "Dress shields, Gudrod's carls!"

Swain ran around behind the center and called to Gudrod, himself.

"Keep touch with us! To the left, fool! Hakon will drive a wedge in that gap!"

But instead of replying, Gudrod began to run, and all his folk with him, and they made off to the right and toward Hakon's line, with sudden howls of glee. And Hakon's line, even while Swain watched, opened up a path for them, howling encouragement.

A sharp burst of sardonic laughter quivered to the frosty stars.

"Ho, ho, Ingi, a merry jest!" "Welcome, Gudrod!" "This way, Sudreyarmen! This way for the Ingi-slayers!"

"Gods!" cursed Swain. "May they find their last beds in Niflheim, the nethermost frostworld of ——!"

But he wasted no time in fruitless anger.

"Rest, Ingi's carls!" he shouted. "Bide the advance!"

Behind the center Simon Skalp stumbled into him.

"What said I, Swain?" panted the Vikenman. "Ah, why would you not disperse those sea wolves."

"Had I done so, they would have run at the first shock," snapped Swain. "And carried our line with them. Be content! We are better off, as we are. Back to your place, Simon, and fight. Those of us left are no traitors."

"They are three to one now," groaned Simon.

"Heart up! Who fears death?"

"It is not death I fear! Well I knew that head——"

And Simon lurched away across the snow, reeling like a drunken man. Yet he had himself in hand again when he reached his post, and Swain heard his voice raised in grim humor.

"No sea wolves, those Sudreyarfolk, carls! Rats, they are! Pull out that line. Two Vikenmen can do the work of five of Gudrod's breed."

In the center Ingi already had undertaken to extend the front to cover some of the ground occupied by the right wing, and his cheerful smile and cool words of encouragement had quenched the first tendency to panic. The crippled king greeted Swain without a hint of dismay.

"It had to be, Swain. We might not have prevented it—and we are better off without such wild, cowardly folk to shake our array."

"Better off or worse off, we have no choice now," responded Swain. "If our luck is good, it is good. If not—Humph! But whatever else betides, I will slay Gudrod. No man can trick me so, and live."

He glanced at the king, hesitated, and then continued.

"This last stroke was unforseen. To say truth, our chances are very poor, for we have no Erling or Gregorius to support us. If you mount your horse you can ride up to Raumarike, and secure help and shelter, and we can be holding Hakon in play the while. No man would blame you."

"And no man would applaud me," answered Ingi, smiling. "No, Swain. I have been a poor king, but it is my greatest luck that I have never fled battle. I will not begin to do so now."

"I am not the man to urge you to change your luck," quoth Swain. "Forward, Orkneymen! Erik, do you keep our folk by me. I am of a mind to slay three men before daybreak."

"Who are they?" asked the king.

"Gudrod, Hakon and Olvir. And this is the first time I ever placed men ahead of Olvir in the order of my hate."

Hakon's line by now was within spear-cast, and missiles commenced to hiss through the air; but Swain directed Ingi's folk to retain their spears until they could reckon confidently on driving through shield and mail. Consequently, the first folk to fall were in Ingi's array. But Swain's policy was justified in the event, for when he did give the word to hurl spears so many men dropped in the opposing line that Hakon's progress was stopped short.

Neither side had many archers. Indeed, the whole instinct of the two hosts was to come to handgrips. And after swaying uncertainly, Hakon's shieldwall closed up the gaps and came on, raggedly and in swaying lines, yet with a kind of stubborn persistence that spelled willingness to accept punishment.

What happened next was so confused that no two men ever told the same story of the battle. For a time, in fact, there were three separate battles, whirling and twisting over the ice. Hakon, himself, with Olvir Rosta and Sigurd of Reyr, bore down upon Ingi's banner, for they had the news from Gudrod that the king, himself, was by it. But Swain met them by drawing in the center and thickening it, so that the attack beat around it, but could not overrun the shieldwall.

Off on the left, Hakon's right wing had closed with Simon Skalp and the Vikenmen, and since there were also numerous Vikenmen on Hakon's side in this part of the field the conflict was conducted without mercy. Gradually, the two bodies of men drew away from the main battle that revolved about Ingi's center, and fought what was really an independent encounter, which came to an end long after dawn with the deaths of Simon and Halvard Hikre, who led those Vikenmen in Hakon's host. No more is said of this struggle, except that few who entered it came out alive.

It was otherwise in the center. After the first shock, when he had thrust back Hakon's attack, Swain saw Gudrod and a horde of the Sudreyarfolk come swirling in from the right, thinking to take Ingi's position in the flank before the king's men had recovered from the assault in their front. Swain hastily drew off his personal following of Orkneymen, with Erik and the two scalds, Armod and Oddi, dropped out of Ingi's array and circled around at a run, slashing into Gudrod's people at the precise moment they bit into Ingi's shieldwall.

The Sudreyarmen were not the warriors to support such a blow. They screeched with fear, and turned to run. But before they could make off Swain reaped a heavy toll for their treachery. Gudrod he slew with his own hands, and he took the dead king's head and stuck it on the spear of Ingi's banner staff for all to see.

"So much for traitors!" he shouted to Ingi to make himself heard in the uproar. "If I have equal luck with the other two I must slay!"

"Why not?" returned the crippled king. "We are holding our own."

Swain pointed right and left with his dripping blade.

"We hold our own, king, yes—but we are alone. Simon has eddied off there toward Thralaeberg. We have no right wing. And here comes Olvir Rosta with a shieldwedge, which the fools should have tried at first. Well, well, we can be proud of ourselve so far. Hearts up, carls! Shields under your chins! Never let the Roysterer say he ran over us."

The hacked remnants of Ingi's following answered him with a desperate cheer. They had closed up the holes in their ranks, and were formed now in a dense oblong mass, with its longest side fronting Hakon's attack. Toward this side of the oblong, Olvir was leading a huge wedge of armored housecarls, the pick of Hakon's folk, who came forward at a run, with the heaviest men at the point of the wedge, the Roysterer, himself, its peak.

Swain ploughed his path into the front rank of Ingi's array, pushing men ruthlessly right and left.

"Way there, carls," he ordered. "If Olvir comes, it is for me to meet him. The man who slays him shall answer to me for it. He is my foe, remember! Ho, Olvir, here I am! Meet me now, shield to shield! It is Swain calling."

But Olvir ignored him, and abruptly shifted the aim of the wedge to the left, shearing away the whole of that end of the oblong of Ingi's folk—a dreadful blow. And then, revolving rapidly upon its point, the wedge came on again, boring this time deep into the side of the oblong that had been mutilated. Simultaneously, Hakon and Sigurd attacked in front, and Swain

was put to it to withstand their assault.

Men died by scores, by hundreds, under that storm of death. The snow was puddled crimson. Packed tight, short of breath with their efforts, men fended one another, chest to chest, and the only sounds were the thudding of the axes, the swish and chop of the swords, clang of steel on steel, gasps, groans the broken prayers of the wounded.

Swain, hacking right and left with his terrible sword Hausakliufr, heard a startled grunt from Erik, who was guarding his back.

"What?" he panted.

"Ingi's—banner—down," gasped Erik.

Swain cut himself free of his nearest enemies, and spun around. The banner was down, as the Icelander had said. Where it had been was a swirl of men fighting confusedly and without order.

"Back!" snarled Swain. "We must find the king."

Those of *Deathbringer's* crew who lived were about him, and they promptly rallied to his call, forcing a way through friend and foe alike, Erik and the two scalds fighting shoulder to shoulder with Swain in the press.

The snow hereabouts was spread with a carpet of dead and wounded men, and the footing was slippery and uncertain; but Swain drove ahead steadily into the heart of the swirl he had marked when he first turned. And he had his reward. He slew a big uplander with a shoulder cut, and as he wrenched his blade loose he came face to face with a bloody wreck of a man he recognized for Audun, the banner bearer, who still held a fragment of the banner staff in one hand.

"The king?" cried Swain.

Audun pointed between his straddled legs, and Swain looked down to see Ingi's pallid face smiling up at him from a red pool in the snow. The king's eyes were closed; his features were composed as if he slept. But Swain's practised gaze perceived the deep gash in the silvered mail-shirt, under the left armpit.

"Who slew him?" he questioned sternly.

"It was Olvir," answered Audun, the salt tears trickling into his beard. "He would take his place in the shieldwall in that last shock! I begged him, but——"

Swain stooped, and lifted the misshapen body very tenderly to his shoulder.

"He died like a king," said the Orkneyman. "He would have wished it so, Audun. But this is one more score I have against Olvir's account."

Hausakliufr heaved aloft in a gesture of command.

"Ho, Ingi's men! To me! Follow Swain! Here, Orkneyfolk! Here, Norsefolk! Back to the town. Let us save all we can from the slaughter."

And ell by ell they fought their way to him, those who survived of the center, perhaps eight hundred or so, and two or three hundred more of Simon Skalp's men. Their helms were dented, their mail was hacked and torn, their shields were split, their swords and axes notched and bloody; but the sight of the dead king nerved them to a cold resolution that matched Swain's temper. Again and again as they hewed free of their enemies, men asked Swain to let them relieve him of his burden. But he always said no.

"There is not much to Ingi in the body," he said. "It was his spirit that was big. Hah, carls, there will be high feasting in Valhalla tonight! Let us send a few more of his enemies to wait upon him, so that the old gods will know we honored him."

Hakon's folk were wearied from marching and fighting a day and a night on end, and they soon abandoned the pursuit of men from whom was to be expected nothing but hard knocks and little plunder; and devoted their energies instead to wrangling over the spoiling of the dead friends and foes who were scattered wide across the ice.

Olvir Rosta alone raged helplessly up and down, seeking aid to bring the Orkneyman to heel.

"But that is Swain, I say!" he protested to young Hakon and Sigurd of Reyr.

"You can see him, yourselves! There he goes, with Ingi's body over his shoulder. Rally a thousand or two of our folk and——"

"No, no, Olvir," denied Hakon. "For my part, I am glad Swain has escaped. I hope that if I died on a stricken field I might find a friend like him to carry my corpse to a Christian burial."

"We have slain enough of Ingi's folk," said Sigurd. "It is not good to slay men unless you must. And who is there today can say that Hakon is not rightfully King of Norway?"

"You will be fortunate if Swain does not contrive an excuse for many folk to say no," growled Olvir.

XXIII

ERLING slumped lower in his chair. There were beads of sweat on his forehead, although the inner chamber of Unna's Tavern was not proof against the biting cold that kept the Bergenfolk under cover that night.

"Go on, go on," he groaned. "And then?"

"Why, if I had had my way," growled Swain, "I would have given Ingi haugh-burial on the deck of his longship, with a few *thralls* to keep him company. But that woman of yours bleated like a sheep, and all the priests set up a squeal, so the end of it was they laid him in Halvard's church, on the south side without the choir. A poor way to bury a hero, I say!"

Erling smiled faintly, despite his misery.

"It is like you to feel so, Swain. But what you say of Ingi is just. He was a hero. Men will never feel the same way about me, whatever deeds I may perform."

"And that will be your own fault," quoth Swain bluntly. "A man who accepts bower-leading——"

"No more, Swain, no more! I have had my lesson. I—I— How can I make you understand?"

"You can not."

"Ah, but you little know what a woman like Kristin can do! And always she has held out to me the interests of our son——"

"Humph!" rasped Swain. "His interests have never been more hopeless, have they?"

"Hopeless?" exclaimed Erling. "Do you think that——"

Swain snorted impatiently.

"Use your wits, carl! What chance have you or Magnus against Hakon today? It is midwinter, the Norsefolk are weary of fighting, Gregorius' friends are in no mood to risk their lives in your behalf, Simon Skalp and Haldor Brynjolf's son are dead, and with them the greater part of our friends among the Vikenfolk. Elsewhere men ask only that they may be left at peace."

"But it will not always be so," answered Erling. "Surely the day will come when the Norsefolk will turn against Hakon's crew of outlaws."

"Perhaps," agreed Swain.

"That will be the moment for me to strike for Magnus," cried Erling. "Will you help me, Swain?"

"Help you?" snarled Swain. "Why should I? Thanks to you, Gregorius and Ingi are dead and I must flee Norway—as must you, yourself."

Erling's ugly face was mottled red and crimson through his beard.

"There is justice in what you say," he assented quietly. "But you will do me the credit, Swain, to believe that no man save you could talk to me so."

"Words!" snapped Swain.

Erling leaned forward and poked at the fire in the brazier between them.

"I am through with Kristin," he said suddenly. "She is my wife, to be sure, but henceforward we dwell apart. For I know she is not the kind of woman to bend her will to me or any man not of kingly rank, and I see clearly that in the years to come I must think first of all of my son's well being."

"Now you talk sense," growled Swain. "Before you put this mare in your stable you were a good friend and a trustworthy, Erling. If you recognize how low your fortunes have fallen and act wisely it may be you shall yet live to recover what you allowed Ingi to lose for you."

"But you say that I must flee Norway?"

"For a while. Hark you! When I came to Bergen I thought never to say aught to you but curses, but— Well, we have been friends in the past. But it is not that. No, I will be honest with you, Erling. It is not that. You have no claim upon me. You forfeited it when you allowed Ingi to march to his death."

The sweat beaded out upon Erling's forehead again.

"True talk," he assented.

Swain went on as if he had not spoken.

"But I am not one to accept defeat tamely. Also, Jarl Harald told me when I came to Norway this last time in response to Ingi's plea that it was folly, and I think men will talk about what has happened and make jests over it. Yes, 'Swain's Folly,' they will call it. But it is in my mind to turn the jest the other way.

"For another thing, this is the first defeat I have suffered at Olvir's hands, and I do not propose to allow him to enjoy his triumph any longer than I can help. Indeed, if you will do as I say we may make Hakon's folk very unhappy, for all the victory they have won."

"I will, Swain," Erling promised eagerly. "I never had cause to regret your advice,

and I am first to admit I was a fool ever to flout it."

Swain pondered a moment, peering into the blue flames that danced above the charcoal in the brazier.

"Are all the chiefs in the hall without friends you can rely upon?" he asked finally.

"Yes."

"And do they include most of the men of rank who are favorable to you or opposed to Hakon?"

"All," answered Erling promptly. "There was a great flocking of such men hither so soon as we had the tidings of Ingi's death."

"We will go out to them now," said Swain, rising. "And when we are seated, I will say that it behooves those who must expect Hakon's enmity to have a leader for the folk to rally around. To this you will reply, asking me if by leader I mean king? And I will: 'Yes, for the land requires a king, and we who loved Ingi owe it to him to see to it, if we can, that Norway should be united under the one king.'"

"And then?" questioned Erling.

"Then you must speak to the different chiefs who might have any claim to the crown, and ask them if they will have it."

"But they might accept!" protested Erling.

Swain grinned.

"Not they! They will be taken by surprize, and furthermore, they will know that whoever is selected must flee the land for the time being. Likewise, it is the plain truth that no other man has claim as good as that of your son."

So Erling agreed to put Swain's plan into practise, and the two went out into the hall of the inn, where sat many famous and wealthy men at tables which had been ranged close to the long central hearths. And these men all welcomed Swain and Erling heartily.

"Here are places," called a man named Jon Halkel's son, who was a relative of Simon Skalp. "Sit here, Swain and Erling."

"Gladly," answered Swain.

And Jon pointed to the deserted dais, where the arras behind the high table blew about in the draughts.

"It is a good thing that we have no king tonight, who must preserve his state and sit in that cold place," he said.

"It is a good thing, in a way, yes," answered Swain; "but bethink you, carls, we are in a sorry plight without a leader."

"That there is no gainsaying," growled several men.

"But what do you mean by a 'leader,' Swain?" spoke up Erling. "A king?".

"What else?" said Swain. "A land without a king is a poor place in which to dwell, and there are few here, I suppose, who fancy Hakon's leadership. Yes, I consider the land requires a king, and we who have loved King Ingi owe it to his memory to make certain that whoever follows him on the throne—he having left no sons, on the right hand or the left—shall be one acceptable to him, who will carry on his policy of uniting the Norsefolk under the one rule."

There was a general murmur of assent.

"It is likely that we could occupy ourselves no better than by discovering who among us that has a claim to the crown will accept it," said Erling.

"It will be a thankless task," replied Jon Halkel's son.

"I am sorry to hear you say that, Jon," returned Erling, "for I had thought that it might be our friends would agree upon Nikolas, Simon Skalp's son, seeing that his mother was a daughter of King Harald Gilli. And in that case, you, who are the lad's elder relative, might be his guardian and array his men for him."

"No, no," denied Jon. "The thought was never in my mind, and I will have none of it. Nikolas is not so closely related to Ingi as others, and I am frank to say I do not believe his father was sufficiently liked to make the boy's cause popular."

"That is unfortunate," said Erling. "Yet all men may applaud the moderation which you reveal, Jon."

He turned next to Nikolas Skialdvar's son, whose mother had been a sister of King Magnus Barefoot.

"I am farther removed from the line of succession than Simon Skalp's son," answered Nikolas Skialdvar's son. "Also, I am not capable of assuming such a burden."

"We do not seem to have any luck," remarked Erling. "So far we have dealt with those whose claims came by the distaff side. How if we approach Arne of Stodreim, who wedded King Ingi's mother, Ingerid, and whose sons are half brothers of Ingi?"

But Arne started up from his seat at the other end of the table and cried his dissent.

"I am well content with the estate I now

possess," he said. "My sons are well off, too. But if this was not reason enough for declining such an offer, I might add that there would surely be unfavorable comment should a son of Ingerid's and mine be crowned, since Ingerid was wedded to Ottar Birting and to Ivar Sneis after King Harald's death and before she wedded me, and by both of them she had sons."

"We shall do wisely if we walk wide of a mare who has cast many colts," said Swain. "Else there is like to be trouble in the stable."

"But there we have no luck at all," deplored Erling. "The throne goes begging."

"It need not," said Arne, who had spoken before, "for the right king is one who occurs to any man's mind."

"And who is that?" challenged Swain—Erling biding silent at a sign from the Orkneyman.

"Magnus Erling's son," retorted Arne. "For Magnus is likewise son to the Princess Kristin, and through her, grandson to King Sigurd the Crusader, and thereby is nearest allied to the direct descent of the crown."

"It can be said that others are allied scarce less closely," said Erling modestly.

"But in addition to his descent," continued Arne, "Magnus has the advantage that Erling is his father, and all men know that he is the wisest and most prudent *lenderman* in Norway."

Many men shouted assent to this.

"It is a great honor that you would do me and my son," said Erling. "How if we submitted the case to Swain, who is an Orkneyman, and albeit he has been my friend, we have not always agreed and he is like to be fair as another?"

"Yes, yes," shouted the chiefs. "Hear Swain! Let the Orkneyman decide!"

"My judgment is that Magnus should be king," growled Swain. "If Erling will heed advice and work with caution I do not doubt but that the boy will some day come to real power."

"I shall always heed your advice, at any rate, Swain," interposed Erling. "And if you believe that I should take upon myself this task—which is so difficult that others with equal claims with me are loath to assume it—I will do so. I am like to have little pleasure from it for a while."

"You are," agreed Swain. "For if you will be guided further by me you will leave Bergen as soon as the ice is out and fare for Denmark. King Valdemar there is related by blood to your son through his mother, and with proper inducements should be persuaded to lend you whatever help you require to secure an armament to lead against Hakon in the summer."

The chiefs discussed Swain's plan until late that night, and at last all agreed that it had best be adopted. The next week they held a Thing in Bergen, and at this Thing the folk formally chose Magnus to be King of the whole country and those chiefs who had served King Ingi were appointed to hold the same offices under him. Magnus was five years old that winter, and a handsome, sturdy lad.

And in the early spring Erling sailed with his son and a great company in ten ships, and they fared south outside the skerries and reached Denmark without harm, where King Valdemar gave them a hearty greeting and promised Erling all the aid that was necessary to secure Magnus on the throne.

Swain did not accompany Erling, for he was determined to return to the Orkneys and place his property in order before plunging again into the civil war that rent Norway. He was able to sail in comfort, with all his folk, because King Hakon sent him his dragon *Deathbringer*, which Hakon had captured along with the rest of Ingi's fleet at Oslo.

"I am aware that it is probable I owe you my life, Swain," said Hakon in the message which went with his gift, "for I should never have gained the shore from my ship's deck in the fight under Hising if you had not stayed the hands of your bowmen. This that I do now is an acknowledgment of my debt to you, but the next time we meet let there be no mercy between us. You are too dangerous a foe, and I have often wished I had taken Olvir Rosta's advice and sought to slay you as you retreated into Oslo with Ingi's body on your shoulder. It might have been better for me had I done so. If you had died there I do not believe Magnus Erling's son would have ever have come to be king in Norway or any other land my longships could reach. Bad luck to you and a gallant death!"

"Ha," exclaimed Swain when he had heard the message repeated with some trepidation by the merchant who bore it, "this is a brave young king, and an honorable, as I have always contended. It is a

pity he is on the wrong side of the shield-wall."

Swain was early bound for his voyage, as Hakon had seen to it the dragon left Oslo in good condition, and he made a quick passage and ran in through the outer isles to Gairsey, where his folk welcomed him very joyously. Two days afterward Jarl Harald came to Gairsey, having heard the news of Swain's return.

"Well, Swain," said the Jarl, "it is good to have you back, but I hope you are cured now of your folly. Little benefit have you had of it, save manscathe and unpaid labor."

Swain grinned not unkindly.

"So you deem it folly that I went to Ingi's aid when he called for me, and bided faithfully with him until his death! If that is folly, Harald, I shall live in folly the rest of my days."

"But surely, you have had enough of wandering so widely, and will remain at home and——"

"Guard you from the Sudreyarfolk? You need not fear them any longer. Hakon has them under his banner, and there they will stay until they die—those that do not fall to me."

The Jarl stared at him bewilderedly.

"It has always been said of you that you were wiser than most men, Swain," he exclaimed. "But it is not wisdom to return to Norway. Ingi is dead. Erling, men say, has fled to Denmark."

"No man can win all the time," said Swain; "but he who plans carefully can look to triumph at the end of the road he selects for himself. So much of bad luck must come to any one. So often will friends take the wrong turning or accept foolish advice. But the carl who refuses to abandon his courage, and who keeps his sword sharp and his face toward his enemy—Humph! He will have good luck some day. He may even earn a profit from his folly."

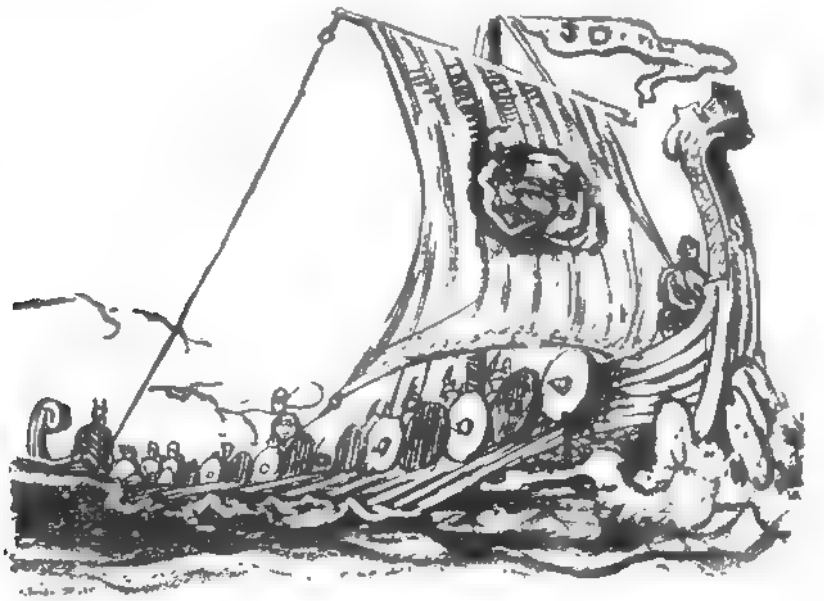
"You were never a man to take advice," answered Jarl Harald, shrugging his shoulders.

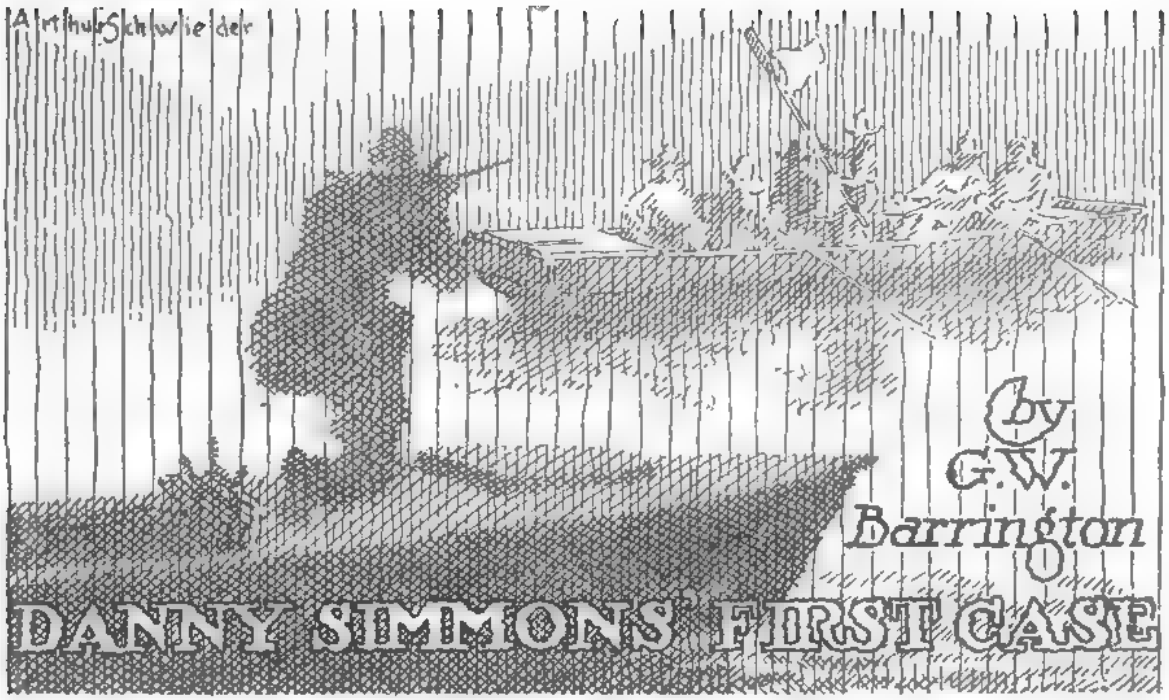
"No, I go my own way."

"It will not advance you in men's estimation, however, if you gain a reputation for foolhardy exploits," the Jarl pointed out.

"Oh, make an end of this gabble!" roared Swain in sudden fury. "Call what I have done folly. I am content. I foretold it long ago. Let men prate of 'Swain's Folly,' if it tickles their vanity to have a laugh at me. What do I care for the little flea-people who leap and bite upon the honor of chiefs? I have done as I thought right, and it is my purpose to act the same way the next time. If I promise a man my aid he shall have it, be it folly or wisdom for me to keep my word.

"Humph! What else is a promise but folly! A step in the dark, an undertaking of who knows what! And honor is folly, too, for many men like Olvir Rosta live without it. But I find I have a weakness for such toys, and I intend to indulge myself in them. So take me as I am, Harald. Otherwise I may not be."





Author of "Still Hunters," "Mostly by Phone," etc.

COTTON Belt engine No. 176, pulling her accustomed mail train through the dark drizzle of a chill fall night, coughed and panted her way to the top of the moderate divide which lies between the little village of Ruskville, Texas and the small city of Seminole, twelve miles northwest.

"Red" Pullen, fireman, sweated and grimed by a long session of continuous stoking and coal passing on the long up-grade, glanced at the steam dial, smiled contentedly, wiped his dewy face and neck on a ball of clean cotton waste and scrambled to his cushion for a brief respite during the easy slide down to Seminole.

On the opposite side of the cab, "Big" Murphy, the engineer, was in the working posture of his craft—hand on throttle, eyes boring into the darkness ahead from under the rim of his billed cap, ears sensitive to the rhythmic drum of the wheels on the humming rails, the jar and squeak and rumble of gear or the muffled roar betokening cattle guard or culvert.

On duty, the veteran engine pilot conserves his forces, even as he employs them. Just as his body reclines at ease on the cushion, at the same time braced to the uttermost limit of split-second efficiency in an emergency, so his hand rests on the throttle even as it holds it, and eye and ear work steadily with what might be termed a casual alertness—the whole man, after hours of arduous service which would break down a novice, still ready on the instant for that fine coordination of eye, mind and hand which spells safety for crew and passenger in the face of imminent disaster.

Big Murphy's head was out of the cab window as the train rounded the curved cut at the brow of the hill and took to the down-grade, but it came in with a snap when the engine reached the straight, and the powerful headlight gleamed along the rails where, a furlong ahead, lay the trestle which spanned Saunders Creek.

As Murphy jammed the throttle shut and sent compressed air hissing against the brakeshoes, Red instinctively braced for an expected shock, but at the same time he hauled on the whistle cord without waiting for orders.

Even as he worked, Red glanced ahead out of the corner of a worried eye and saw what appeared to be the ends of several pine poles projecting upward a foot or so from between the timbers of the bridge, toward which the train was sliding at a speed that was all too fast.

Noting in a flash that the grip of the brakes on the wet rails was insufficient, Murphy released them, hauled the reverse lever entirely over, opened the throttle again, at first gingerly to give the back-spinning wheels a grip, then wide open,

helped by the sand stream which the ready fireman had sent pouring from the dome above the boiler to dribble between rail and driver rim—just little insignificant particles of a common product which roll between helpless humanity and grim death, when a wise engineer remembers the stock rule of his brotherhood:

"Give 'er air, and if that don't stop 'er, give 'er steam, and if that don't stop 'er, give 'er sand."

The sand stopped 'er, not only in time, but full fifty yards before reaching the trestle, which was a hundred feet or more in width.

Again shutting off steam and jamming on the brakes, Murphy tucked a lantern under the hollow of his shoulder, swung to the ground and started up the track, cinders crunching beneath his heavy tread. Ahead, he could see the bobbing light carried by the nimble Red, who had swung down and scurried toward the trestle before the train had come to a stop.

Just as Murphy reached the near abutment, he saw Red stop at the obstructed point and kick one of the pole ends, at first tentatively, then vigorously.

Much to Murphy's surprize, the dripping cylinder flattened under the impact of Red's foot, and dropped out of sight between the ties. As the engineer increased his pace and drew nearer, he saw Red kick another and another of the queer-acting pole ends, each of which promptly collapsed and disappeared.

As the industrious Red disposed of the last obstacle, he turned and called sharply:

"Hey, Murphy! It's a fake. Look out for the engine. They're nothin' but bark peelin's rolled up to look like logs."

Too late! Before Murphy had labored half the distance to firm ground, a fusillade of shots sounded alongside the train, and, an instant later, old 176 jerked into activity, gathered speed quickly and came snorting down the track, wide-open and a roaring.

As the two running men cleared the bridge, the engine, with combination mail and express car attached, passed them and went clattering out on to the trestle at ever-increasing speed.

Poor Murphy, enraged at the sacrilege his eyes had witnessed, leaped for the cab step, secured precarious hold on the hand rod and was about to clamber up when a shot sounded from the tender behind, and the engineer, shot through the head, sprawled backward and rolled down the embankment, dead on the instant.

The discreet Red, fully aware of the futility of repeating the useless sacrifice he had witnessed, threw himself flat and rolled into the bushes beside poor Murphy's body.

The engine and car went pounding on, and Red immediately scrambled back to the roadbed and commenced to concern himself with what should be done next.

The conductor and brakemen, together with a few pale-faced and inquisitive passengers, came running from the train, eager for the details of what all knew must have been a successful attempt to capture the mail coach.

There was the usual milling about and shouting of questions and suggestions and general confusion, by taking advantage of which bandits of all time have been enabled to work coolly and unmolested, almost in the presence of forces which, if organized and properly led, could easily bring about their undoing.

RED PULLEN was a person of limited intelligence, but he was a railroader, from scalp to toetip. Being so, his first instinct was to follow old 176; so, while excited passengers and crew tramped about the scene of the hold-up, Red slipped quietly away down the track in the direction the engine had gone.

Red had no definite purpose in mind, but acted only upon the impulse of an old railroader drilled to stick to his job.

It was just past midnight, and the night was pitch dark. Red's lantern was lost, but he plodded on, stumbling along on the tie-ends. Three miles ahead he knew lay Seminole. Had he paused to consider, he would have known that the robbers would not proceed far in that direction.

But Red didn't stop to consider; instead, he tucked his head down to keep the drizzle out of his face and trotted forward several hundred yards, only to bring up with a resounding thump against the rear bumper of what he knew must be the mail coach.

"Who's that," a gruff voice growled a few yards forward, and with the words came three pistol shots in rapid succession, the bullets hissing menacingly, perniciously close.

"I'm goin' somewhere's," grunted Red, as, for the second time that eventful night he hurled himself down the embankment.

As he scrambled out of the ditch and away through the brush, he heard voices raised in altercation behind him, volley after volley of pistol shots and the sound of rending wood as the bullets crashed through the car.

Pausing at a safe distance in the timber, Red heard the door of the car slide back, and in the square of light stood the express messenger and mail clerk, their hands held high in token of surrender. A moment they stood thus, then commenced throwing out mail sacks and express packages.

Red had seen enough. Circling back to the track, he started on a brisk trot toward the lights of Seminole which brightened the sky some two miles ahead.

Having covered half that distance, he came to a farm house beside the track.

"Hello, there! Hello! Hello!" bawled Red Pullen.

II

OLD BOB FORREST, veteran sheriff of Seminole County, was sick, and his tongue was coated and his digestion was away off and his eyes were inflamed and his pulse was unsteady and his respiration and his temperature were unsatisfactory and his lungs felt as if some one had tamped them full of hot sand with a dash of powdered glass in it.

Doctor Brookheart, bless his earnest, plodding soul, had ridden through the slop to count that pulse and examine that tongue and thump those lungs, and shake his wise old head and dole out potent powders and capsules—six doses of calomel to be taken an hour apart, five grains of quinin every three hours and pretty little pink fever tablets to be taken as needed, with a mansize dose of Epsom salts, ever looming as an inevitable sequence, two hours after the last instalment of calomel.

Whether the sheriff's ailment was grippe or dengue or malaria or incipient typhoid had not been fully determined, nor was a conclusive diagnosis at all necessary. In any case, the treatment would have been the same, for the good doctor, like many of his backwood colleagues, proceeded upon the sound theory that, no matter what ailed a man, a little quinin and calomel would do no harm, while a round dose of Epsom is sound practise, whether the patient is suffering from gastritis or a broken leg.

Having been muffled under the covers at eight for intensive treatment, the sheriff already had grunted his protest over four of the hourly doses of calomel, and Ma Forrest had shaken the fifth into a teaspoonful of water, stirred it around with the paper in which it had been neatly folded, and was just preparing to jam the spoon between the sheriff's reluctant lips, at the same time holding a slice of orange suspended alluringly in her other hand, when a voice called lustily from the road in front of the house, hurried feet scraped and thumped across the porch and a loud rapping sounded on the door, followed immediately by the uninvited entrance of George Barnes, near neighbor toward town, who lived right where the wagonroad joined the railway right of way.

At Barnes' muddy heels tramped a damp, greasy, disheveled, hatless, mud-bespattered man, who commenced to talk before the door was fairly open and continued to talk as he approached the bed, Barnes unfortunately attempting to assist the stranger to deliver information which evidently was as exciting as it was important.

Quinin, be it known, is one of the most potent drugs in the materia medica, beneficial to the extreme where its influence is called for; but its immediate effect is to muddle, rather than clarify, a brain already set spinning by fever, so the sheriff was in no proper condition to pick sense out of the jargon which assailed his ears.

However, he did catch the words "train robbery" and "shot the engineer," also a few other mangled words and phrases which gave his disturbed mind an inkling of what the messengers of disaster were striving to communicate, so he rolled to a sitting posture, threw his feet to the floor and reached instinctively toward the peg where hung his belt and holster, at the same time relieving himself of that stock inquiry essayed by every man when first he rises from a bed of pain—

"Ma, where's my pants?"

Ma Forrest, ever shy in the presence of strangers, and ordinarily wont to efface herself when the menfolk were conversing, now grew suddenly bold and surprizingly authoritative.

"Bob Forrest, git right back under them kivers!"

"But, Ma, you heered what these men said. They's been a robbery, an' a killin', an' I'm the sheriff. I——"

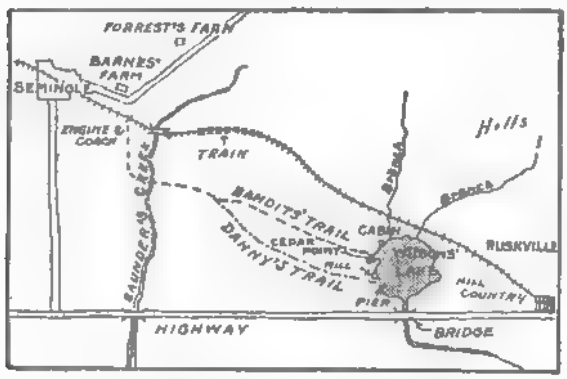
"Yes, yer the sheriff, shore 'nuff," answered Ma defiantly, "an', besides bein' the sheriff, yer my husban', an' I 'low t' keep ye fur a while yit. Trapesin' roun' in the sloppy woods'd be the death o' ye! If ye hain't got no sense a-tall, I hev, so I'm a-tellin' ye that ye don't stir nary foot out o' this here house tonight!"

"But Ma, Seminole depends on me, an' I jist nachu'ly got t' do suthin'!"

Ma Forrest placed her hands, thumbs forward, on her expansive hips, inclined her elbows slightly to the front, compressed her lips and looked steadily at her liege lord.

Beset as he was by the mingled assaults of fever and quinin, the sheriff instantly recognized that attitude, so compromised by wobbling uncertainly to his favorite rocker and reaching for the phone.

Luckily enough, Luke Haskell, senior deputy, and Danny Simmons, junior deputy were at the office, interesting themselves



by studying the ramifications of that ancient and more or less honorable game called poker.

Masterful under pressure of emergency, even in his shaky condition, the sheriff got Luke to the wire, acquainted him with the bare facts, and mapped out his plan of campaign.

"Fust thing ye do," instructed the old war horse, "send Danny on the jump t' pick up the trail where it leaves the track. If them fellers is professionals, they'll only go a leetle ways into the timber, 'fore they open the sacks, divide the stuff, an' scatter. In that case, they've got cars som'ers about the neighborhood, so plug up the big roads.

"If they're local talent, they'll figure on layin' out in the woods, so ye kin look fur 'em t' do a hull lot o' walkin' 'fore mawnin'. We gotta get at 'em both ways, an' take no chances.

"You stay right at the wire, an' call up every constable, an' tell 'em to git help and cover the bridges tight. Don't take no chanct on lettin' the wrong feller git through; stop all o' 'em, an' keep 'em stopped.

"If it keeps on a-rainin', the trail will be gone 'fore mawnin', so tell Danny to foller it fur at least a mile, an' see which way they head, an' whether they open the sacks or not. Hev 'im t' send a man back 's soon's he's found out anything. He better take three-fo' men along——

"What say?

"Well, send some men arter 'im right away. They may ketch up 'ith 'im, but I doubt it."

The sheriff leaned back, sweating and exhausted, and, as Ma hazed him back across the rag carpet and rolled him into bed, said to himself, as much as to her:

"Danny's a good boy, but a mite too suddent like. He listened in while I was a talkin' t' Luke, an' when they looked fur 'im he was gone. Looks like he's tackled a purty hefty proposition, all by hisse'f, but Ma, I believe I'd rather be here a takin' calomel than t' be out in that woods with Danny Simmons arter me."

So saying, the sheriff obediently licked the last vestige of powder off the spoon, and dropped into a semi-stupor, his round, flushed face showing above the snowy linen like a blood-red sun hanging over the Arctic snows.

III

DANNY SIMMONS was too thorough a woodsman not to know the value of time in picking up that trail, hence his haste in starting for the scene of the robbery.

Danny had waited only to secure his precious little rifle with two belts of cartridges and an extra box slipped into his jacket pocket by way of insurance. Then he had mounted and dashed down the right of way at a speed that was anything but cautious.

Just as he had passed the open country and entered the wooded section, he encountered a culvert which the pony could not cross, so he abandoned the animal and proceeded on foot as rapidly as possible.

It is doubtful if the bandits had abandoned the mail coach for more than an hour before Danny reached the scene and,

by aid of his flashlight, picked up the trail which ran almost straight south.

The messenger and the mail clerk, both unhurt, informed the officer that there were at least five in the attacking party, and that they had carried off a great deal of booty—enough, in fact, to prove a real hindrance to their flight.

Fully realizing the force of the sheriff's instructions to follow the trail at least until the intention of the bandits had become evident, Danny brought all of his woodlore to bear upon the task of getting over as much ground as possible before the steadily falling rain should obliterate the track. In this work his years of experience at trailing stood him in good stead.

As long as the trail ran comparatively straight, which it did in the main, he walked in the track made by the others; when it curved toward a swale, he knew better than they where the crossing was to be found, and frequently cut off a few hundred feet by going directly there.

Everything that the bandits had done was an open book to Danny. Here they had stopped, probably for a consultation, then had started off at a slightly altered angle. At another point, they had set down their burdens, perhaps to make a more equitable division of the loads than was possible during the exciting moments at the car.

Again they paused long enough to empty a whisky flask, and light pipes and cigarets.

Always the general direction of their flight was toward the Lufkin-Tyler Highway, which ran almost parallel with the railway and about eight miles distant from it.

Danny had not proceeded more than a quarter of a mile before he knew that the bandit band had been underestimated and that there were eight of them—a most unusual number for such an enterprise, which fact gave rise to a suspicion that they were novices, as did the additional fact that they kept on into the timber without stopping to rifle the sacks, and scatter, to meet again at some point far distant from Seminole.

TRAILING by flashlight is slow and uncertain, at best, and it is probable that Danny, though an expert, occupied fully an hour in covering the mile or such a matter that he had progressed, when he lost the trail momentarily on a rocky knoll, only to pick it up again, running almost straight east.

Here was the first dilemma and it was a grave one.

The sheriff's instructions had been to send some one back, as soon as the intentions of the robbers had been ascertained, and now there was no one to send.

In his hasty zeal, Danny had assumed that those who followed would come at the same headlong speed that he had employed and would catch up with him by following the flashes of his light, but in this he had been disappointed.

Now the question flatly presented itself: Should he go on, entirely out of touch with possible assistance, or should he return, at least as far as the train, and forward a report to the office?

The responsibility was heavy and all of it rested on Danny Simmons. It was his first big moment as deputy, and the decision which he arrived at was entirely characteristic of the man.

Danny went on alone, determined to follow that trail so long as he could see a trace of it.

But, though courageous, Danny also was cautious and ever inclined to look for the best of a situation.

At the outset, he had plunged boldly ahead, certain that he was far enough behind his quarry to be safe. He knew that in case they halted to sort the booty a light would be necessary, which would furnish him timely warning. Now that he had satisfied himself that they intended to remain in the wooded country and make a dodging game of it, he felt no assurance that he would not encounter them at any time.

Still bent upon trailing as far as possible, Danny was equally determined to do the job in a fashion that would reflect no discredit on his woodsmanship.

He employed the flashlight only when its use was unavoidable. He stopped to listen frequently. He availed himself of his knowledge of the country in every possible way; and, above all, he brought to his aid that intangible instinct, that subtle intuition, which dwells within every born trailer, enabling him to sense the intention of his adversary.

That the flight of the robbers had not been undertaken aimlessly, he was well convinced. Professionals or amateurs, they were no mere blunderers; the manner in which the actual crime had been executed belied that.

So, as the minutes passed and the trail grew dimmer and more uncertain, Danny racked his brain steadily in an attempt to guess the first objective of the fugitives.

Finally, as a lightening of the eastern sky announced the coming of dawn and a drenching shower quickly obliterated the track, Danny thought he glimpsed the intention of the eight, who, probably three or four miles ahead, must soon seek cover before daylight should catch them.

This was not so much a fanciful theory or random guess as a deliberate conclusion arrived at by a process of deduction.

One thing, he felt certain the men had not anticipated—the promptness with which pursuit had been undertaken.

Red Pullen's blind flight into the darkness and the luck which led him almost to the sheriff's door, also the fortunate circumstance of the poker game being in progress added to Danny's impulsive action in bulling ahead instead of waiting for a posse to be assembled, all, doubtless, were factors with which they had not expected to cope.

Under no other circumstances could their trail have been followed before it had disappeared, so they had been justified in proceeding upon the theory that morning would find their pursuers unable to guess in what direction they had gone or how they had traveled.

Why had the men gone, first south, then east?

Danny Simmons thought he knew, so he abandoned further effort at trailing and set off at a brisk pace in a direction slightly south of east.

ABOUT five miles ahead of Danny lay Wilson's Lake, ordinarily a swampy lagoon, now filled by successive freshets until it comprised a body of water circular in form and about two miles across.

On the side nearest town was an abandoned sawmill, with tumbledown shacks, long since thrown into disuse. It was a lonesome and unattractive locality, visited only by occasional hunters and fishermen.

The lake was fed from creeks which passed under the railroad, and its outlet in high-water time crossed the highway a few hundred yards to the south.

It is to be remembered that the railway ran from southeast to northwest, while the course of the highway was due east and west, so they gradually converged until they were but three miles apart at the lake.

Danny's belief was that the bandits had chosen a rainy night for the crime, thus no trail would remain in the woods; then they would cross the lake before morning, to seek refuge in the rugged hills which formed a veritable outlaws' paradise on the opposite side.

In other words, Danny imagined that the outlaws had crossed from the hill country in a boat, looted the train and fled in the direction from which it had come.

As Danny was confident that the highways had been covered in ample time, the lake was the one gap left open by the sheriff, so Danny proceeded there with all speed.

DANNY arrived at the clearing in front of the old mill just as the rain ceased and the sun rose from behind the opposite hills.

One glance sufficed to show him that no boat was crossing. The question then became: Had they already made the crossing or were they somewhere in the wood behind. Also, of course, there was the possibility that his conclusion was a wrong one and that they had taken some other route.

Still keeping to the timber, Danny walked slowly in a course which ran parallel with the shore, and, having passed the tumbledown mill, he obtained a clear view of the dilapidated pier, once a landing stage for logs, now a tipsy mess of planks and timbers resting precariously on drunken piling.

Then Danny Simmons smiled his homely smile and mentally patted Danny Simmons' straight back; for there, swinging lazily in the suction of a light off-shore breeze, lay a large, clumsy scow, one that Danny well knew belonged across the lake.

Instantly Danny decided to untie the craft and allow it to drift out into the lake, but, before putting the plan into execution that ingrained caution which had so often served him in good stead caused him to look about for possible enemies.

And, coming suddenly from behind Cedar Point, a hundred yards or so north of the mill, he saw the burdened eight and saw too that they were nearer the scow than he.

It was all clear then.

In the darkness the robbers had borne too far north, coming out at some distance above the mill. Then, with the trail behind them nicely washed away, they had taken

to the water, thinking to reach the pier, leaving no traces.

Burdened as they were, their progress through the water had been slow, while, coming at speed over a more direct route, Danny had been able to reach the spot first.

And now, what next?

Help must be near, of course, but time was precious and none could be spared to race to the bridge and give the alarm.

Danny set his teeth grimly, wiped the damp from the little rifle, selected an oak log as a fortess, threw off his battered Stetson, brushed his clammy hair back out of his eyes and was ready for business—a shock-headed, lithe-bodied, beady-eyed fighting machine as dangerous as he was elusive.

For the time being, it was Danny Simmons and the gang for it. That boat might cross in spite of him, but it would not carry eight, and there would be a little noise first.

Leaving the water at the pier, the leader untied the scow and stood with his foot on the thwart while the others deposited their burdens on the boat's bottom.

The men appeared hurried and anxious, while their burly leader was continually urging haste.

The plunder having been stowed to his satisfaction, the leader stepped aboard, picked up an oar and waved to the others to do likewise.

Unable at the last second to bring himself to shoot an unwarned man from ambush, Danny stepped to the top of his log and called—

"Stop! Come back in the name of the law!"

Caught entirely unaware, jerked from fancied security to face forces the strength of which they could not estimate, the outlaws on the pier cringed back from the boat and huddled together, inactive for the moment; but the leader, more courageous, or more desperate, dropped his oar and drew his six-gun with one motion, firing from the hip as the heavy pistol left its holster.

Like an echo came an answering report from the log, and the big outlaw reeled, made a game but futile effort to raise his weapon again, then slid over the side and splashed heavily into the water.

It has been said already that Danny Simmons' courage was spiced with caution. Unlike the movie hero and the yellow-back demi-god, he did not stand erect on the log and offer himself as a target or go charging forward, dealing destruction right and left—an indestructible superman.

In fact, as the other's hand sought his holster, Danny dropped behind his log to fire the answering shot from a reclining position there; then, almost with the recoil of his piece, he started to crawl, snake-like, to another log fifty yards off to the right, from which safe position he remained an interested but silent and inactive witness as the bandits charged down the swaying wharf to the protection of the bank, from which vantage point they fired volley after volley into the log behind which they had seen their enemy disappear.

With such a situation Danny was well content. During the succeeding ten minutes he could have picked off a man or two easily enough, but to do so would have advertised his change of location, which he had not the slightest thought of doing, except in moment of dire extremity.

Also Danny well knew that every minute told in his favor; for, if the sheriff's orders had been followed, a dozen men or more were at the bridge on the highway little more than a mile distant, and the sound of gunfire carries far through morning air, especially along water.

So Danny, ever regardful of his own skin and never willing to assume an unnecessary risk, contented himself with attempting to hold the bandits away from the boat as long as possible, keeping well back where he would have the advantage of the superior range of his weapon over theirs.

That was Danny's strategy.

But it appeared that there was at least one strategist in the opposing force, and he was no mean one.

SUDDENLY the firing at the lake ceased entirely, then began again, but the alert deputy quickly noticed that it lacked its former volume. Suspicious on the instant, he drew still farther back into the timber, just as three of the robbers emerged, dripping, from the water and charged his former position, those remaining at the pier firing furiously to keep their enemy occupied.

Encountering no enemy at or near the log, the three called the others and all took to the wood in an endeavor to beat off their tormenter. Then, as if by previous arrangement, all suddenly turned and ran for the

boat; but, as they came to the open pier again, none appeared willing to negotiate it. Again they sought cover where pier and bank met, while Danny promptly returned to his first hiding place, shrewdly aware that it would be the last spot they would suspect.

During the succeeding lull, that God-given sixth sense, with which those who live close to nature are gifted, warned Danny that some one was approaching his position from the rear. Something, perhaps the snapping of a twig, the rolling of a pebble, the drag of a boot across a rock, the very breathing of the man himself, registered on sensitive faculties tuned to receive it.

Then the slight swaying of a bush caused him to focus all his attention on that spot, and, as he watched, a man crept slowly into view, coming almost directly toward Danny's hiding place. His head was down, well hidden behind a broad-brimmed black hat, but as he raised cautiously to hands and knees to get a view of the lake, Danny smiled with satisfaction for the second time that morning, for the newcomer was bluff, honest old Jed Harold, landlord of Seminole's principal hotel, probably a posseman, certainly a friend.

Whistling softly and showing himself guardedly, Danny attracted Jed's attention, and the latter crawled to Danny's side.

A few questions briefly put and as briefly answered, elicited the information that but six men had been detailed to watch that particular bridge over on the highway, and that Jed had sent one of them to broadcast a general alarm as soon as the firing had commenced. The other four he had left a short distance away, coming forward himself to get the lay of the land.

Then Danny Simmons gave some peculiar orders.

First, he sent Jed to bring up the four possemen, who were posted advantageously along the edge of the timber, and immediately commenced to engage the outlaws, who had reopened fire.

Then Danny inquired for a saddle horse and, having been directed to where Jed's was tied, announced that he would place Jed in command for a time, having a little business elsewhere.

"Now Jed," cautioned Danny in parting, "keep your head and don't do nothin' brash. Them fellers is bad, an' they're plumb desp'rit now that they know what they're up against. I held 'em, because I was able to dodge 'em when they come out, but five of ye couldn't hope to do that.

"Jist lay low, an' if they lay low too, so much the better. No use t' git two-three of the boys killed if we kin he'p it. Hold 'em forty minutes any way ye kin, then if they want to git into that boat let 'em!"

UNDER the circumstances, inactivity on the part of the outlaws could not be expected for any length of time. Knowing quite well that every minute was telling against them, they soon charged again in a mad attempt to clear their front of enemies.

Obeying orders implicitly, Jed withdrew his men as the others advanced, both sides dodging from tree to tree in true Indian style.

Pistol fire rolled continuously, positions were shifted and reformed, the outlaws grimly bent upon coming to grips with their tormentors, Jed maneuvering successfully to avoid a hand-to-hand conflict against odds, which he knew would be costly, even if successful.

As it was, Lem Whitcomb, garage man, was carried to the rear with a bullet in his lungs, Jed suffered a nicked shoulder, and one bandit was seen to limp to the shelter of the mill, where he was found later, fainted from loss of blood through a flesh wound in his thigh.

Finally, after what appeared to Jed to have been hours of steady combat, the six surviving bandits staked all on a rush to the scow.

Jed looked at his watch. The allotted time had elapsed with some to spare, so he ordered firing to cease, and the men in the scow, unable to comprehend why immunity had been granted them, rowed desperately away from shore, looking fearfully over their shoulders as the clumsy craft drew away.

A quarter of a mile the awkward, slow-moving barge crawled toward the distant hills, a half, three-quarters, almost half-way now, and still they drew on, unhindered and unthreatened.

Men commenced to shout in the timber toward the highway; others appeared on the shore above the mill, all eventually to drift to the pier and join Jed's little army.

Over and over the suggestion was made that a force be sent around the lake to cut

off the retreat of the robbers—no simple feat considering the rough nature of the opposite bank.

But old Jed, confidence in Danny unshaken, held his forces at the pier.

Then from behind Cedar Point came the *putt-putt* of a motor boat, which soon hove in view, bearing steadily toward the scow at a rapid rate of speed.

In the bow of the craft was Danny Simmons, reclining at ease, as one out for a pleasure spurt.

At the tiller was Harry Haverly who lived in a fishing shack near the north end of the lake. As the launch reached the vicinity of the scow, it sheered off, passed in a wide circle and stopped near the far shore and directly in their path.

As the barge came within range—not pistol range, mind, but rifle range—Danny rose and lifted the little rifle to his shoulder.

The scow stopped.

Those ashore and those in the launch could only conjecture what discussion was engaged in in the flatboat, but after a few minutes of rest, its bow was turned north, and the oars again were worked vigorously.

It was of no use, of course. After allowing them to labor and sweat for a time, Haverly started the engine, and again the motor boat circled and cut them off, Danny nonchalantly presenting the rifle again, just out of pistol range.

At this stage of the strange game, the crowd on the pier, now swelled to the proportions of a small army, heard a tremenduous shouting, and a pony came bursting through the underbrush at top speed—Luke Haskell, freed at last from his long vigil at the phone by news that the fugitives had been located. Yes, headlong, hasty, up-and-at-'em old Luke, chafed by enforced inactivity, his nostrils quivering with the scent of battle.

Dismounting at the mill, he romped out on to the pier with a great jingling of spurs and clattering of high-heeled boots on the rotten planking.

A dozen men showered him with excited explanation of the extraordinary spectacle his eyes were witnessing; then he threw himself on the wharf, beat on it a rattling tattoo with his spurs and shouted between howls of merriment, an observation which has become historic in Seminole community:

"Danny's got them wild birds tamed! He's done surrounded 'em an' put salt on their tails!"

It appeared that Danny had done something about like that, for, after another half-hearted start for the far shore, the scow returned to the middle of the lake, where a white rag, lashed to the blade of an oar, was raised above it.

The crowd on shore immediately became silent, every man there being firmly convinced that the robbers had employed the flag as a ruse to entice Danny within pistol range.

As every forehead creased with anxiety and men scarcely breathed so great was the tension, the launch started and drew down slowly toward the other craft.

Some one groaned there on the pier, and Jed Harold cursed and gritted his teeth and stepped toward the water as if about to dash in.

Slowly the little launch drew on toward the sullenly waiting scow. Then, again just barely out of pistol range, Danny Simmons rose to one knee, raised the little rifle, aimed with unaccustomed deliberation and fired.

It was the prize shot of his career as a sylvan champion, for as the tiny smoke wreath puffed lazily above the launch, the blade of the oar shattered into splinters and the rag fluttered into the water.

That was quite sufficient, thank you.

The contempt shown for their attempted ruse was bad enough, but the deadly accuracy displayed by a marksman who was able to stay tantalizingly just out of reach, yet had it within his power to kill every man in the scow at any time he chose, completely crushed the spirit of the bandits. The scow turned and plodded toward the pier with the little launch creeping relentlessly in her wake.

IV

ALL his calomel safely disposed of, quinin dosage reduced to a bedtime ceremony, tonic substituted for fever tablets, Sheriff Bob Forrest had arrived at the chicken-broth-and-jelly stage of convalescence, when word came that the search for the bandits had terminated successfully.

This time, abject pleading prevailed where attempted high-handed defiance had failed in the first instance.

The sheriff got his pants.

With Ma's stubby forefinger wagging in

front of his nose, and her capable tongue spraying him with words of caution, he had just installed himself in his favorite rocker and taken a few tentative whiffs at his neglected corncob, when his two deputies burst in unannounced to make personal report that the miracle had been performed at last, and that, for the first time in thirty years, the peace and dignity of Seminole County had been vindicated, with Sheriff Bob absent from the firing line.

As the strange tale was concluded by the admiring and entirely unenvious Luke, chief speaker of the evening, the sheriff turned to the silent Danny and, with a twinkle in his eye, inquired whimsically:

"But, son, how'd ye know they'd stop? What made ye think they wouldn't come right on an' take a chanct 'ith ye?"

Danny answered with simple directness—

"Well, ye see I'd recognized several of 'em while we was cavortin' aroun' there at the mill, so I figgered they must know me, too."

Then, blushing furiously at having been guilty of what might be construed as boasting, Danny hastened to add apologetically, yet pridefully—

"Ye see, Bob, that little gun's got a right good reputation in this man's country."

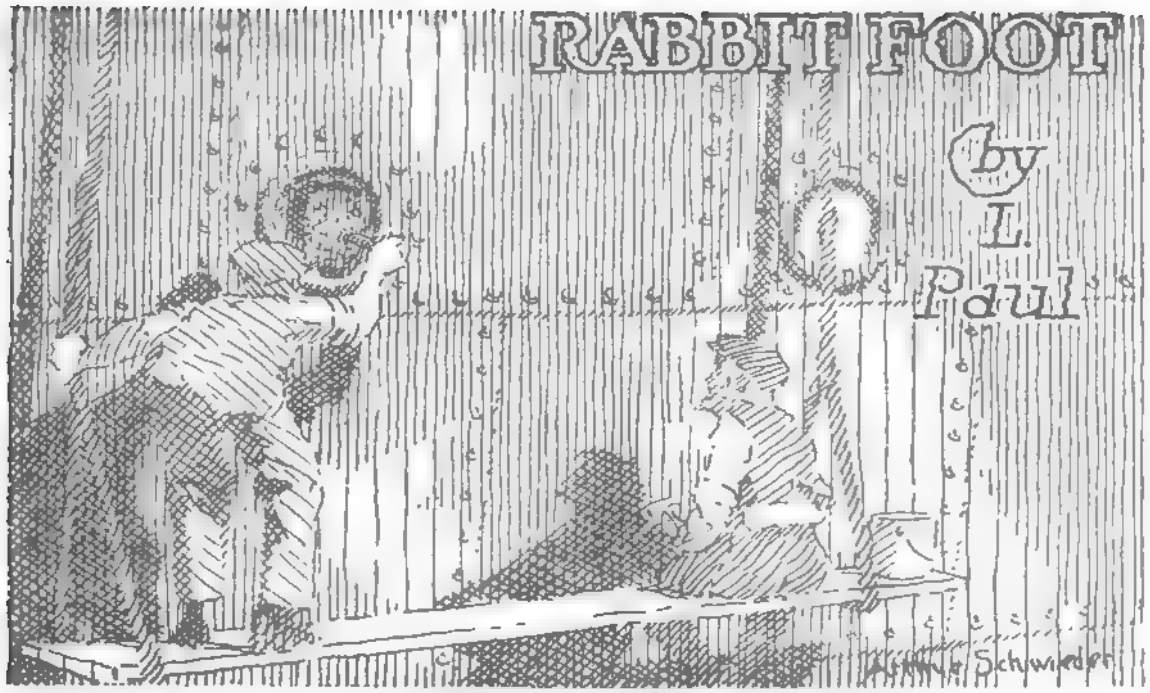
MA FORREST came trot-trotting from the kitchen with what might be termed elephantine grace, threw back the bed cover suggestively, turned down the light significantly, placed her hands on her hips with the thumbs to the front, pointed her elbows slightly forward, compressed her lips and turned toward the corner where the trio had been conversing.

But both the blood-drinking, death-defying deputies already were shambling sheepishly toward the door, while that lion-maned man-tamer, the sheriff, was pacing obediently toward the bed, as a prisoner returns to his dungeon after a brief season of liberty.

Once during the night Ma rose hurriedly, felt her mate's pulse solicitously and viewed the clinical thermometer anxiously after he had slept placidly for a time holding it beneath his tongue.

All of that because she had heard him chuckle softly, gleefully in his sleep, and mutter—

"The bes' way t' ketch them wild birds is t' go roun' 'em, an' put salt on their tails."



THE *Sirius* was loading grain at Montreal. She was a dirty, rusty old tramp that had seen better days. Once she had even presumed to carry passengers between little-known ports where liners never called. The four spare cabins amidships remained, but they were locked, never used, now that she had entered the Atlantic trade.

The second mate, Briggs, a middle-aged, husky man, stood by the forward hatch and looked over the *Sirius* with disapproving gaze. He had been second mate aboard many craft in his time, but never, he felt, had he sunk as low as this until the present voyage.

Yet the *Sirius* alone was not responsible for his grouch. The night before he had enjoyed what he himself termed "a night on the tiles." It had left him with a headache, a dry throat and the confirmed opinion that the life of a tramp's second mate was plain ——.

Sad as all this was there remained a third and deeper cause for gloom. Upon returning to the ship in a condition he himself recognised as happy, Mr. Briggs had been just in time to welcome aboard none other than more-or-less able seaman Simmons, a big man and a thorn in the second's flesh. And Simmons, despite the assistance of three husky harbor policemen, had been reluctant about coming aboard. He was under the impression that the poor old *Sirius* was sinking at her moorings, and had proclaimed the fact to the watch and the second mate in loud and blasphemous detail.

Mr. Briggs had taken this in silence. He who prided himself on as good a working vocabulary as ever made life —— for forecastle folks, had meekly taken Simmons' performance as a matter of course. The pot could not call the kettle black.

But now, on the morning after, his pride was hurt. What a chance he had missed!

As he strolled aft the second thought of many biting remarks he might have made. But the opportunity had passed.

He continued aft, climbed a steep ladder and entered the dark passageway leading to the unused spare cabins. The second did not have that childlike confidence in his captain which is proper to mates. He knew that the Old Man was both a sniffer and a searcher. A liberal ration of cloves had, he felt, defeated any possible sniffing. And if the Old Man searched Mr. Briggs' cabin for concealed liquor he would not find any. Oh no! Mr. Briggs was no blessed infant.

He paused opposite a narrow door, slipped a skeleton key from his pocket, looked furtively about and saw he was unobserved. Then he opened the door and stepped into one of those dusty unused cabins.

From a locker he drew a stout, square bottle. Then, settling down comfortably

on the berth, Mr. Briggs began to absorb liquid hairs of the dog that had bitten him.

Tap—tap, tap—tap. The noise seemed to filter through the skin of the ship. Mr. Briggs rose, loosened a butterfly nut, swung the thick glass open and peeped out of the port-hole.

A few feet below a dejected little man was chipping away at the rusted side of the *Sirius*.

Mr. Briggs smiled happily. He had been trying to think up some highly disagreeable task for his enemy, Able Seaman Simmons. Now he had it.

He returned the bottle to the locker and went back, cautiously and unobserved, to a brighter, better world. He knew that in the forecastle Simmons still slumbered. He had passed over this breach of discipline purposely for he wasn't going to have the first officer spoiling things.

The first had a way of taking men from him for easy jobs. But now it was different. Once Simmons was overside on that narrow plank, chipping away at the rusted plates of the *Sirius* he would be sentenced for the day. So the second plunged cheerfully into the dark forecastle and reached one hamlike hand into a bunk where it closed on a shock of long hair.

There was a howl of protest. And then Able Seaman Simmons came reluctantly into view.

The second looked him over.

He was a big man, was Simmons, but a bit out of repair. His lips were puffed and had been bleeding; one eye was black. His knuckles were skinned. A liberal plastering of waterfront mud still clung to his clothing. He stood there, swaying in the dim forecastle, eying the second mate uneasily.

A bad memory had Simmons. He recollected that they had met—rather unconventionally, he feared—the night before. But he wasn't sure of the details. The mate, he suspected, had both a long and an accurate memory.

"Now what?" The mate teetered on his toes ready for action. "Now what, may I ask, was you a-doing, *Mister* Simmons?"

"Sleepin'," the big sailor replied with the air of a truthful man.

"Sleepin', what?"

"Sleepin', sir."

"Now is that so? And when did you hire this here fo'csle, *Mister* Simmons? Since when did swabs o' sailormen rent this craft for their blasted hotel? D'ye think I've nothin' better to do than play at bell hop, Simmons, chasin' round and coaxin' you out o' your boodwar?"

Simmons was silent. He wiggled his bare toes nervously. His big hands clenched and unclenched. He longed to take a crack at the second mate, but he'd been at sea most of his life and knew that only occasionally could this be done with safety. And this wasn't one of the rare occasions.

"Feelin' poorly, are you?"

The mate came closer. His eye noted those bare feet. He lifted one heavy boot and plunked it down again. As if by accident the edge of the sole caught Simmons across the bare toes.

"You'll feel worse come night," the mate snarled, dropping his mockery. "Overside with you and lend a hand to Emmet. There's a nice hot sun overhead that'll sweat the poison out o' you, my lad. And mind, I'll have an eye on you."

SIMMONS had doubled up, nursing his bruised toes. For one wild moment he was tempted to risk everything, to smash a fist into the sneering face of his oppressor. Then, controlling himself, he slouched away, came on deck and, grasping a hammer, slipped overside, down a rope to that narrow plank where sat the man Emmet, still pecking away at the rusted plates of the *Sirius*.

"He'll pay," he muttered, "blast him, let him wait. He'll pay."

Little Emmet stopped even the pretense of work. "So he found ye?" he asked sympathetically. "I knowed it. By the smile on yer dial I c'n see that our Mr. Briggs has been a-callin' on yer personal, Simmons."

"I'll get him. I'll get the blasted——"

"Hold hard, mate," Emmet cautioned him. "Don't you get a-talkin' that way. Think as you likes, but keep a close mouth. Moreover 'tis a judgment on ye, runnin' loose ashore."

"I was celebratin'." Simmons felt his damaged eye tenderly.

"You don't think he done all this by hisself, does you?"

"In course not." Emmet looked his big comrade over. "Judgin' from the ruins, you've been a-playin' with a bloomin' menagerie. No second mate alive could make so good a job of you, 'Selfish.'"

"Selfish!"

Simmons turned on him.

"Aye, Selfish. Here's you and me, shipmates for ten year. More than a mother I've been to you, too. And wot—"

Emmet spat disgustedly into the oily harbor—"and wot happens? Does Simmons say, 'Here, I've a bit of the blunt, so let's go mop up two beers or mebbe three.' No, sir. Off you sneaks alone and here you be, fair torpid, beat up scandalous. That eye, now!"

"Never you mind that eye," Simmons growled. "That eye was done good humored, likewise these lips, in a barroom. Who done 'em and how I'm not sayin', me havin' a bad mem'ry. But these toes, blast him, 'twas the second mate stomped on 'em with his boots."

He fumbled in his pocket for his bit of chewing. A blank look stole over his bruised face as he drew his hand out again. It clutched a peculiar, hairy object.

"Now when did I come by that?"

He stared at it.

"Ho, Ho!" Emmet chortled after a single glance, "a rabbit's foot—rabbit's foot for luck! Prime luck it's brought you, shipmate."

"Luck?" Simmons' sluggish memory stirred. "Why, that's what the black blighter said—luck."

"And who's the black blighter?"

Simmons scratched his head.

"As to that, lad, it's none too clear. There was Blackface and Whiteface and me, ye see, kinda argyin' together. An' I hit Whiteface and the black one gave me this, an' I come aboard ship."

"Throw it overside, lad," Emmet counseled. "His intentions was kind, was Blackface's, and right and proper they should be, seein' he was drinkin' beer that should ha' wet Emmet's throat. But don't you meddle with no black man's magic. It don't work right for our sort. Look what it's done to you already. Precious luck you've had. Throw it overside, mate."

"That I'll not." Simmons stuffed the rabbit foot back in his pocket. "Things can't get no worse. They've just got to get better."

He smote the side of the *Sirius* so viciously with his hammer that he broke the head off. It fell with a loud *plop* overside.

"That'll come out o' your pay, my lad."

A voice came from above. The second mate had returned to the spare cabin to refresh himself. Big Simmons looked up. The second's broad face filled the port-hole. It was just above his own head.

Picking on him, was he? Hanging around where even a second mate had no business, trying to get something on a poor sailor man? Big Simmons glared wrathfully at the hammer handle. Then he got clumsily to his feet, one hand on the rope, the other grasping the splintered bit of hickory.

"You'll pay for that, Simmons," the second went on. He was enjoying himself for he knew that even small annoyances could hurt. "Think you can chuck ship's stores about like that?"

Simmons looked aloft. Nobody else in sight. Then his hand went back; his arm flexed. The second's face vanished suddenly from that open port-hole. Two inches of splintered hickory had been rammed into his mouth.

Muttered, stifled curses came through that open port.

"My ——! You'll catch what for!" Emmet gasped, then stretched out his own hand. "Here, hit him with this if he shows. Might as well do him in proper."

He proffered his own hammer.

"I done him proper already."

Simmons peered into the spare cabin. The second mate was rolling around on the floor, both hands over his bleeding mouth.

"Look busy!"

Emmet, glancing upward, saw the vizor of a uniform cap at the rail. The captain had come out on deck, was glancing down.

Simmons tore the hammer out of his companion's hand.

"I need this more'n you do," he grunted.

Little Emmet seized a scraper he had wedged between the rope and the end of the plank and began to toil fiercely.

The captain watched them for a moment. It had been hard work getting that paint out of the owners. And though the *Sirius* was a tub she was his command.

"That's right, lads," he called down, "make a clean job of her before you slap on the paint."

"Yessir."

Emmet edged along the plank and dropped his voice.

"If I was you, Simmons, I'd swim for it," he advised, "rabbit foot or no rabbit foot."

"He can't do no more than he's done, spoilin' the day like he has." Simmons replied. Then he grinned. "——, 'twas

worth hangin' for. If you'd seen him rollin' round like a stuck pig."

UP ON deck the captain turned from the rail as Second Officer Briggs stumbled out into the sunshine. His face was streaked with blood. In his hand he clutched two broken teeth. His cap was off and his collar had gone adrift. He leaned over the rail and glared savagely down at those two faithful toilers.

"C'm'ere!" he roared, "come up on deck you —— mutineer! I'll show you, I'll——"

"Mister Briggs!" The captain's voice was cold. "Just what's wrong?"

"Stick me with a hammer handle, will you?" The second heard nothing, saw nothing but big Simmons. "Strike an officer——"

"Mister Briggs."

The captain turned on his hurricane voice. Briggs heard.

"What's wrong with those two men?" The captain came closer.

"What's wrong? What's w-w-w-rong?" Briggs spluttered in his rage.

He shot out his hand and the two broken teeth wobbled on its open shaking palm.

"A fine state o' things when a sailor can do that to an officer! Rammed me in the mouth, he did."

"Who?" asked the captain.

"Simmons. Without no provocation. But I'll learn him, I'll——"

"And where?" The captain, too, could be sarcastic. "Where did Simmons do all this? You haven't sprouted wings, Mister Briggs. Nor yet are you so invisible you could slide down that there rope without me seeing you. And the man's been working steady there below, overside. Why, I've had him under my own eye, personal. It's my opinion you've been biting something, Mister Briggs. Something you can't chew—" the captain sniffed—"or it's cloves, Mister Briggs, maybe cloves loosens teeth, sir. But Simmons— No! It stands to reason he couldn't. He's big, is Simmons, but he couldn't reach clean across the guts of the *Sirius* from where he is overside and knock out your teeth."

"He did——"

The second mate started to explain, and then was silent. What if he did make all clear? The captain might ask what *he* had been doing in the spare cabin, might even go down to visit the scene of the crime. And then, being a searcher as well as a sniffer, he might log a certain second mate.

"You're in no shape to carry on, Mister Briggs—" the captain shook a stubby finger under his nose—"you're drunk, sir, that's what. Take them teeth away, sir, take 'em away. They make me sick, looking at 'em."

Down below two sailormen grinned happily.

"What price rabbit foot?" Simmons asked in a whisper.

"You can tell me the truth or you needn't," the captain went on, "that is, if you can, which I doubt. You won't, eh? Then go below and sleep it off. I'm out o' patience with you, Mister Briggs. You'd best walk careful from this on. One more fandango like this and I'll get me a new mate."

With a last wrathful, thwarted glance overside Briggs stumbled away. The captain, when he had gone, came to the rail. He had been enjoying himself. Not often does a skipper get the goods on a hated officer so easily. Now he felt at peace with the world, even with the two toilers down below.

"A rotten job, that, for a hot day," thought the captain. "Poor —— with men like Briggs at 'em all the time. I'll be human for once."

He called them up on deck. They came uneasily.

"There's a box up at the agent's," the captain said when they stood apprehensively before him. "You two men go bring it down. No loafing in pubs, now, mind."

"No, sir—no, sir," Simmons assured him eagerly.

This was, he felt, a second example of what a rabbit foot could do for a deserving owner.

From the port-hole of his own cabin where, alas, no square bottle was hidden, the second mate watched them go.

"You wait," he snarled, "you wait, Simmons my lad. One o' these days we'll be at sea."

II

SIMMONS and Emmet slouched out through the hot shed and emerged on a waterfront street where trucks and carts sent up great clouds of stifling dust.

"Strike me, but I'm dry," Emmet

paused, and eyed the gilt sign of the Longshoremen's Home across the street. "Now if so be ye've the price left, why not spend it, Simmons, me lad? 'Tis small use ye'll have for money after Briggs lays hands on ye."

"He won't. Leastwise he won't while I've money." Simmons fumbled in his pocket. "Where you think we're bound?"

"The agent's, to get that there box for the Old Man, bless his thoughtful heart."

Simmons pulled out a wad of crumpled bills.

"Go ahead," he jeered. "Go ahead an' slave, little man. Me, I'm through for the day."

"Come to think o't, why should we?" Emmet brightened. "What's the skipper done for us that we should lug his beastly boxes about?"

He licked his lips and faced the saloon with the gilt sign.

"He's done plenty," Simmons led the way across the road. "He's passed the time o' day with our Mister Briggs and he's got us off the ship, and Simmons ain't the man to waste kindness by throwin' it away."

"You mean——"

"What the Old Man meant. 'Here's two pore sailormen,' says he, 'with that there wild mate o' mine slanderin' an' abusin' them. Now I can't tell 'em to hook it till he gets sober for 'twould not be discipline. But I can give 'em a hint.' And that's what he's done. No, lad, when Simmons goes back aboard he won't care what happens to him. Nor will you if you stick by me," and the big seaman pushed wide the swing doors of the Longshoremen's Home.

Doubtfully Emmet followed.

"I suppose that there rabbit foot'll make it right," he jeered. "Judging from your disposition, the bunny that grew it was reckless."

"That's as it may be," said Simmons, making for an empty table.

Aboard the ship the captain waited an hour for that box. Then he cursed feelingly.

"That'll be a job for Briggs," he decided, and sent for the second mate.

Mr. Briggs had washed away the blood; but no artifice could replace those two front teeth. The captain eyed him with disapproval.

"Now see what you've done," he said rather unjustly. "Just because you wanted to abuse them two sailormen I got soft hearted and give them a run ashore. And what happens? They dive into the first saloon they come to, that's what, I'll wager. You take the bosun and rout 'em out. It's hard enough to get sailors in this port without blunderin' second mates losin' them."

Mr. Briggs opened his swollen lips to reply.

"Not a word. Not a word." The captain turned away.

"I'm off ashore for a spell. If those men ain't back aboard when I come back tonight, there'll be words between us, Mister Briggs."

The second mate went back to his cabin. From a locker he pulled out a set of brass knuckles. Usually he could depend on his rather knobby fists. But this was no ordinary occasion. He had no doubt that sooner or later he would find the errant sailormen. And when he did— Almost could he forgive the captain his harsh words. For had he not given Mr. Briggs the chance his soul craved—the opportunity of settling things once and for all with Simmons?

Then he came on deck, called the bosun and set off.

"You take one side of the street," he commanded. "I'll take the other. If you spot 'em don't make a move till you've told me. I aim to handle them personal."

III

THE bar waiter wiped the table with his dirty wet rag. There was a momentary lull in business.

"Wasn't you here last night?" he asked Simmons.

"That I was."

"Thought so. Well, 'Gold Tooth' Blunt's been askin' for you."

"Gold Tooth Blunt?" Simmons looked puzzled.

"Sure. The big black lad. Sailor, where was your wits last night? You was as thick as thick, the two of you."

A bunch of longshoremen had brought their thirst in as he talked. He turned away as they thumped the tables impatiently.

"Guess Gold Tooth's took a fancy to you." He threw the explanation over his shoulder. "But 'twas funny you presumin' to fight Blunt's battles for him."

"And for why?" Simmons' memory stirred. "Just because he's a pore black

man I s'pose I ought to let any one pick on him?"

"'Tisn't his color—" the bartender paused —"'tis because you don't know Gold Tooth's business. Fightin' battles is what he lives by. He's a box-fighter. And you —you butt in and try to protect the poor helpless man! Anyways, he's lookin' for you. Said he'd be back."

"Mebbe he is grateful." Emmet finished his beer. "Blacks is funny, that way, Simmons. And when they take a shine to a man they'll do anything for him, even to buyin' his beer."

"He done lots already. He give me this rabbit foot."

Simmons slipped a hand into his pocket and felt the hairy talisman.

"You ain't still believin' that rot?" Emmet asked. "You ain't waitin' for that there rabbit foot to pay the treat? 'Cos if you are, my glarse is dry and you've money in your pocket, Simmons."

But Simmons was not listening. Far down the barroom the front door swung open. Silhouetted against the light stood a huge, meaty black man, his face a golden grin.

"Well, well," he roared, "if Ah ain't mistook heah's ma good frien', Mistah Simmers."

"It's him—Gold Tooth Blunt," Simmons gasped. "——, I musta been lit, fightin' to protec' *him*."

"Mebbe he'll buy a beer," hazarded Emmet.

Indeed it looked possible, for the big black man came ponderously along to their table, slid into a chair and held up his hand to the bartender.

"Ah've been lookin' fo' you, Mistah Simmers," he boomed.

"Simmons is the name. And don't go a-bawlin' of it out. I'm in disguise, like."

"Which am mo' important, is you sober?" asked the negro. "When we last met, Mistah Simmons, you was anything else but."

"I don't know about him, but I'm painful dry."

Emmet refused to stay longer outside of the picture.

"Bring yo' trayful," Gold Tooth called to the waiter. Then he turned to Emmet. "You is a frien' of Mistah Simmonses? Well, well, ain't that jes' fine. For Mistah Simmonses is a frien' of mine. We mixed things up las' night. We was, as you mought say, burnin' bright, if not completely illuminated."

"We was pleasant," Simmons objected, "pleasant, that was all."

"Pleasant? You was pleasant, maybe, but Ah was *lit*. Else why fo' did I let you mangle that pore white trash that sot along of us?" Gold Tooth banged the table till the thin legs cracked. "Ah was lit, and does a gemman say Ah wasn't?"

"I ain't denyin' it."

Emmet kicked Simmons under the table. It was all very well to put your faith in rabbits' feet, but here was no mere mate. Even a rabbit foot wouldn't prevent sudden death if Gold Tooth Blunt went amuck.

"Stop hackin' my shins," Simmons growled. Then he turned on the big negro. "That's gratitude," he complained. "How was I to know you was capable of fightin' yore own battles, me a pore simple sailorman? I done what was proper, and if you don't take the sperrit for the deed into account and show how grateful you are——"

"Grateful!" Gold Tooth Blunt thumped the table again. "Ain't Ah just testified, brethern, how Lit was ma middle name? And when that's so, the only other handle Ah goes by is Gratitude. Why, ev'y time Ah drinks Ah gets grateful. And when grateful, Ah goes roun' makin' little presents to ma friends, boonin' them foolish. And the nex' day they comes to me and says, 'Gold Tooth, here's yo' pocket-book what yo' done give me absent minded las' night. Here's yo' watch what yo' persisted I keep."

He paused as the waiter brought the beer and slid his change on to the table.

"Yes," he went on, "when Ah'm lit, Ah'm the givin'es' man you ever saw. But when I'm cold sober——"

He looked expectantly at Simmons, but the sailor made no move.

Gold Tooth Blunt picked up a dime, juggled it between finger and thumb for a moment, then clenched his hand. When he opened it again the dime was bent double.

"Mos' always they brings things back," he said softly. "Sometimes they's fo'getful."

"I ain't got no watch nor yet no pocketbook," Simmons assured him hastily.

"Mebbe yo' don' prezacly know to what Ah am deludin' at," said Gold Tooth, glaring red eyed at the sailorman. "Mebbe yo' is dumb to watches an' pocketbooks an

diment pins, in which case Ah will speak mo' explainin' an' whisper the words, 'rabbit foot.' "

But he did not whisper the words. He roared them.

"Ma lucky rabbit foot," he went on in a voice milder only by comparison. "What Ah've toted fo' fo'teen years. What Ah give yo' while plastic las' night."

"If I'd a man's rabbit foot," Emmet broke in, "if I'd a man's rabbit foot I'd give it to him so quick——"

"L'il white man—" Gold Tooth slapped him on the back approvingly—"was beer sense yo's jus' spoke a brewery."

He turned wrathfully toward big Simmons.

But Simmons was no longer heeding him. His eyes were fixed on the far door whereby black trouble had so recently entered. It appeared that white trouble was following close at heel.

AT THE other end of the room a well-known face had appeared. It was the bosun of the *Sirius*. Even as Simmons spotted him, he turned and vanished.

Simmons pondered over the meaning of this apparition. He came soon to his conclusion: If bosuns come can mates be far behind?

"The las' man what made out fo' to keep that rabbit foot—" Gold Tooth leaned across the table and looked Simmons full in the eye—"the las' man what turned out fo'getful—well, ashes to ashes, dus' to dus' and when yo's daid, what for you want rabbit's foots?"

"If I had that there rabbit foot—" Emmet began reaching again for his partner's shin— "I'd give it back so quick——"

"So'd I, if I had it."

Simmons glued his eye on the distant door. The tables were crowded now. A smoky cloud hung against the ceiling. Yet through it he saw the door swing open; saw, too a gap-toothed, evil grin under an officer's cap.

"You ain't gone an' got reckless?" Gold Tooth gripped his arm. "You ain't gone an' los' ma lucky rabbit foot what I done loaned you while foolish an' fond?"

"It was took from me." Hastily Simmons built up his lie. "It was took——"

"And whoen, whom made free with it. Who's took ma luck?"

"Our second mate. That's him over by the door, now."

Simmons pointed.

The mate followed by the bosun was moving slowly through the crowd toward them.

"He said he needed a bit o' luck more'n I did."

"White man, that's the truf."

Gold Tooth Blunt rose.

"He won't give it to ye," Simmons assured him.

"Fistses, tell the man he lies."

Gold Tooth knotted his great hands and loosened his coat buttons.

"You'd not hit him?" Emmet asked hopefully.

"Hit him?" Gold Tooth lifted one great ham of a hand on high. "Ah'd not hit him. Oh, no! Ah'd jes' nacherly push his face so far my fistses 'd never cotch up."

He turned away. The mate, advancing, was but twenty feet distant.

"Hook it. Back door," Simmons whispered.

The mate seeing them move tried to come on faster. But he was doomed to disappointment. For Gold Tooth Blunt, blocking his path, seized him by the shoulder and swung him sidewise.

"Mistah White Man," he remarked meaningly. "You an me's gwine talk a spell. Has yo' or has yo' not somepun in yo' pocket what has hair on to it and begins with a R."

"Let me go, you —— nigger."

The mate slid his right hand into his pocket and slipped the brass knuckles into place. Once, in his extreme youth he had rashly cracked a hand on a woolly head. He was taking no chances now.

Gold Tooth shook him rudely. Then let go. The mate drew his hand out, measured his distance.

"Fo' the las' time," Gold Tooth roared, "has yo' or has yo' not ma lucky——"

The mate heard the back door close. His arm went taut. His fist shot upward toward the angle of the black man's jaw. Gold Tooth grinned evilly. The mate had telegraphed that swipe. The big black man ducked. Something hard smote the mate, professionally, in the stomach.

"Swaller that," said Gold Tooth Blunt "Yo's ma meat, white man. Now does Ah eat."

Providence in the shape of the bosun, five

longshoremen and the saloon bouncer, interrupted the meal, though with difficulty. From a doorway down the street, Simmons and Emmet watched as the six men helped the mate toward the *Sirius*.

"What price rabbit foot now?" asked Simmons.

"Smart, you are!" Emmet grumbled. "If we go back aboard we catch ——. If we stay here ——"

"Why not?" Simmons asked. "I got money and there's lots of saloons."

"And there's a black man," Emmet went on, "there's a black man who'll be lookin for us. And he ain't the sort to let a little thing like murder stand in his way, neither."

Simmons looked at the damaged mate far down the street.

"Sometimes you speak sense, Emmet," he said slowly. "Sometimes a man'd think you was nigh human. C'mon."

"C'mon where?" Emmet hung back. "When that Gold Tooth finds we've run out on him he'll search, I tell you. He'll look in every pub in this —— town. And, pubs barred, where else'll we go?"

"We can set in the Seaman's Mission and drink cawfee." Simmons led the way. "No box fighter'll look for us there. Then, when it's safe I'm goin' back aboard ship. For I know what the mate can do, and I can take it. But Gold Tooth Blunt——"

Cautiously, hugging the wall, they stole down the street.

IV

ABOARD the *Sirius* Mr. Briggs watched the sunset as well as two damaged eyes would permit. But the red glory of it did not attract him. He was longing for darkness. He loathed daylight. He feared the two wanderers would return while yet the daylight and the first officer, a merciful man, lingered.

But with night the first would go ashore. And in the darkness the second mate felt that even in his enfeebled condition he could mete out justice to Simmons and Emmet. To make assurance doubly sure he was whittling away at a length of hardwood as he waited, making a smooth handle to a very workmanlike club.

Darkness. The first stepped ashore.

"Nice night," he said as he turned toward town.

Mr. Briggs did not reply. Grasping his club firmly, he stationed himself at the shore end of the gangway behind a convenient bale. It *was* a nice night, he felt—for a murder.

Forward, the stevedores fed grain into the hold. The dust rose high, hiding them, cloaking the whole ship in a cloud. The second mate approved of the dust. The darker the better. It would make things sure.

And up at the Seamen's Mission Able Seaman Simmons refused his sixth cup of coffee, felt the furry rabbit foot in his pocket and resolutely got to his feet.

"I'm goin' aboard," he announced.

"You're goin' to your death."

Emmet hesitated.

"Not while I got this—" Simmons drew the rabbit foot out— "unless we meet up with that Gold Tooth Blunt. And even then I ain't worryin' none. He don't look like he could run fast."

Together they left the mission, and by dark streets went back toward the *Sirius*.

The freight shed was dark as they entered it. The rumble of the winches, loading package freight aft, the slurring sound of the grain forward, came to their ears.

"There's no place like home," said Simmons as they neared the ship.

"That there ain't."

Emmet glanced fearfully over his shoulder, expecting every minute to see the vengeful owner of the rabbit's foot.

"Lay low."

He plucked his comrade by the sleeve. "Some one comin' behind us," he explained as they dodged behind a bale. "Likewise I seen a head stickin' out by the gangway yonder, an' it looked brutal familiar."

Footsteps, jaunty footsteps echoed through the shed. A short stumpy figure strode by them, whistling.

But Mister Briggs, second mate of the *Sirius*, did not see the newcomer. One look had told him that Simmons and Emmet were on their way toward vengeance. He had then, discreetly, withdrawn lest, spying him, they escape.

And now, footsteps!

"Blast ye!" cried the second mate. "I've waited for this."

Then the sound of cracking splintering wood.

"The skipper!" Simmons darted out, round eyed. "C'mon!"

Emmet followed him.

The mate was staring stupidly at a short stocky figure prone on the planking, a figure in neat blue serge. As he stared the recumbent man sat up.

"Oh, lord!" gasped the mate and dropped his splintered club, as the prone captain of the *Sirius* lifted up his voice.

"Grab him, men!" ordered the captain.

His command was unnecessary. Able Seaman Simmons had seen the light. He dived, caught the hapless Mister Briggs by the ankles and heaved. As the mate fell little Emmet threw himself upon him.

"Hold him, lads, the murdering maniac."

The captain struggled to his feet, one hand rubbing his aching head. Men were running toward the gangway of the *Sirius*. The captain waved them back.

"'Tis no business o' yours," he cried. "Get back."

His head was singing and his cap was lost in the ruction. He felt he was not the picture of a dignified sea captain. Hence the fewer who saw him the better.

"Get back!" he roared again. "All but the bosun. He can get the police."

The mate sought to struggle free.

"Hold him, lads, he's mad." The captain danced about them as they struggled. "Give him a knee in the guts."

Able Seaman Simmons obeyed. Orders were orders.

The captain came closer, looked in the mate's frenzied face.

"Hit me, would you, Mister Briggs? Laying in ambush like a black savage to scupper me? Well, the police'll give you yours."

Then he recognized his deliverers.

"Oh, it's you, eh?" he said.

"Yessir." Simmons, kneeling on the mate's stomach, turned his head. "We—we was delayed, sorta."

The captain felt he could pass over little faults like delays.

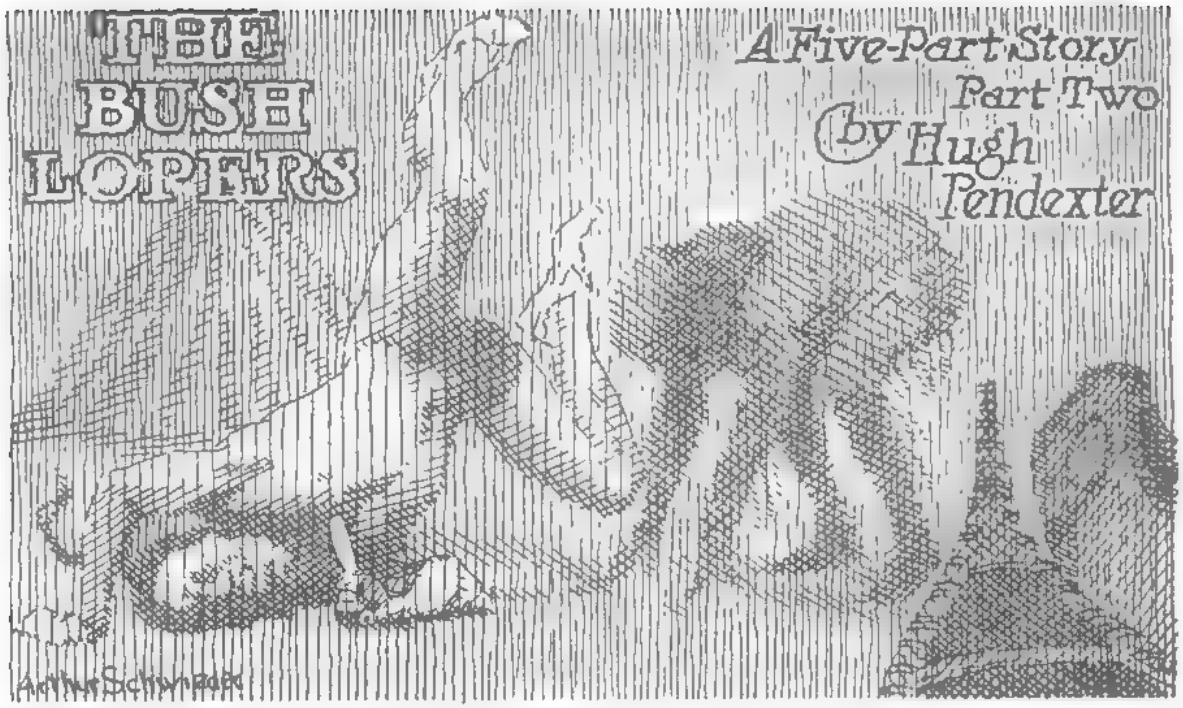
"Lucky for me you were, my man. Look out. He's getting vicious again."

He turned away as the clatter of a patrol rosé at the far end of the shed.

Simmons slipped one hand to the mate's throat and pinned him down, speechless. Better not take any chances. The hapless Mister Briggs might yet stutter an explanation, unless watched. However, he was a merciful man, was Simmons. With his other hand he drew that rabbit foot from his pocket.

He eyed the mate pityingly and then, as the patrol stopped beside them and discharged its freight of husky policemen, he crammed the rabbit foot into Mister Briggs' breast pocket.

"Here, take this," said Able Seaman Simmons. "—— knows you need a bit o' luck."



Author of "The Homesteaders," "Iroquois! Iroquois!" etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

"CARCAJOU"—the Wolverene—was fleeing from Quebec, where he had gone to confess his sins. He was a "bush loper," an illicit trader with the Indians and English; and in this year of 1687 the Government of New France was attempting to maintain a monopoly by inflicting stern punishment on all those who infringed it. Therefore he knew that Governor Denonville was likely to continue the pursuit of him even to Mackinac, to La Baye des Puantes (Green Bay) or to the Narrows (Detroit).

In his flight he learned that one Captain Rooseboom, a representative of "Corlaer," as the Indians called any governor of New York, was heading an expedition to take the Indians' trade away from the French. So also was another New York trader named McGregorie. Immediately Carcajou's nimble mind began devising a scheme whereby he might act as messenger and thereby gain favor with Durantaye, or Du Lhut, or Perrot, French commandants of the Upper Lakes posts, thereby possibly escaping punishment for his free trading.

At Cayuga Creek on the Little Niagara he captured a runaway Dutchman from New York Province named Dirk Brouwer, for whom Governor Dongan had issued a warrant on the charge of smuggling.

"You live, m'sieur," said the bush loper, "on two conditions That you employ me as your *engagé*, and that you travel to Mackinac and La Baye."

At a portage they met the murderer Turcot, the fugitive dandy Chartier, fresh from France; Black Kettle, a Seneca friend of Carcajou; and Dead Bear, a Seneca whom Chartier had rescued from service as a galley slave, and who could not rejoin his Iroquois tribe because he had suffered the disgrace of being whipped.

The strange party paddled its way along the north shore of Lake Erie. At last they made the Narrows, ahead of all pursuit. There they were joined by Papa La Blanche, an old man who had so many wives among the various tribes that he could not remember them all. He was accompanied by Adario—the Rat—chief of the Tionantati. The party held a carouse, then went into a drunken slumber. In the middle of the night Carcajou felt a hand at his throat. He seized his assailant, and by the light of the fire which others renewed he stared in amazement at the stupid face and rolling eyes of Papa La Blanche. Limply clutched in the old man's hand was a long knife—his own.

CHARTIER scrambled to his feet, snatched his rapier from the branch and began rolling up his shirt sleeve. The Rat stood staring at the two clinched figures. La Blanche slumped limply to the ground like a bag of meal.

"He had a war dream," said the chief. "The strong water made him warm for blood."

"*Pardi!* Such a barbarous country," muttered Chartier, dropping back on his blankets.

"Ah, old Papa! The brandy played you a sad trick. It is as treacherous as a mistress. You men and warriors remember; we will say nothing about this. It would hurt Old Nonsense's heart."

He repeated this in Tionontati and then

"The Bush Lopers," copyright, 1925, by Hugh Pendexter.

carried the limp figure to the blankets and replaced the knife in the sheath. After he had returned to his own blankets he mused:

"But I do not understand. A man helpless as a log from drink breaks away from the claws of the Wolverene. I do not understand. But perhaps his medicine bag was open and pointing at us. It must be that."

When he awoke in the morning La Blanche was still sleeping heavily. His attention was attracted to Brouwer, who was on his hands and knees and pawing at the ground under his blankets.

"Has m'sieur also had a dream?" he called out. "Does he dream he is one of those little dogs that live in the treeless country far to the west?"

"——!" exploded Brouwer in English as he hastily searched through his pack.

"What's the trouble, M'sieur Runaway? See here; you should talk while you dig and paw."

"My belt for the Hurons is gone!" bitterly replied Brouwer.

"We were drunk last night—" began Carcajou.

"But the belt wasn't drunk," interrupted Brouwer. "It was in my pack when we made this camp. I did not take it out. I used the pack for my pillow. At first I thought it might have tumbled out. But it's gone. Some one stole it."

"If it's gone some one stole it while m'sieur slept," agreed Carcajou, his mind bewildered by the mystery of it.

"No!" wrathfully cried Brouwer. "I wasn't as drunk as that. No man could lift my head from the pack, open the pack and take out the belt."

The Rat strode forward and demanded—

"What has the white man lost?"

"A small belt he was carrying to the Hurons," said Carcajou. "But it is nothing. He does not need a belt with old Papa La Blanche to speak for him; with Adario, a great chief to speak for him; and with Carcajou, greatest of the *coureurs de bois*, speaking for him."

"If a belt is gone a white man took it," harshly declared the chief. "The Tionontati do not steal wampum nor try to stab a friend in the night."

And his gaze shifted to the sleeping figure of La Blanche.

Brouwer went to Turcot's blankets, kicked them apart and ordered the man to throw off his robe. Then he turned and glared at Chartier and Carcajou. The young Frenchman warned—

"Monsieur's gaze is insulting."

"See here, Brouwer, don't be a fool. Young France wouldn't give a sol for a thousand belts. A nasty thought is crawling in your mind. But here is my pack and blankets. Go through them. If you find nothing I shall beat your head off."

"I have accused no one," Brouwer sullenly reminded him. "And I can get along without the belt. Let us be going on." Then in French, "One of the Indians took it."

Carcajou promptly defended the Tionontati men and was talking rapidly when he was interrupted by a Tionontati who had wandered a few rods inside the growth.

"He has found it!" exclaimed Brouwer, his face lighting.

"It is the cry for the dead, not for a string of wampun," muttered Carcajou.

The Rat bounded away, followed by his men.

"They have found a dead man," said the Seneca, his eyes glittering.

"Here's spoiled fish!" muttered Carcajou.

And he walked to Papa La Blanche, sharply prodded him with the toe of his moccasin and told him:

"Come, Old Nonsense. No more sleeping. Some one may be killed pretty soon."

Then he picked up his rifle and turned to face the file of men emerging from the growth. The savages were howling vengefully. Two men carried something on a stretcher formed by long trade-guns and branches.

When the improvised litter was placed on the ground all recognized the dead man as one of the Rat's warriors who had gone to sleep by the fire. There was a terrible wound in his head. The Rat's eyes glittered murderously as he tossed a hatchet on the ground for the white men to see and said:

"A Tionontati man is dead by a new ax. A French ax. The white men will go to our village."

Carcajou pointed to his companions and defied:

"No. With our guns we will paddle up to Mackinac. A Tionontati man is dead. Why should we kill him? No ax is missing from our belts. The man was killed in the

woods while trying to find where the Seneca man hid the keg of brandy. Is there no red enemy to do this bad thing? Are the Foxes friendly to the Tionontati? Have they never sent out war tobacco, tied to blue wampum that is painted with red, asking their friends to carry a club against Adario?"

The Rat remained silent for several minutes. He knew the man was killed in the woods. He knew there never was a time when a savage tribe did not hate some savage tribe. Intertribal feuds persisted through generations. The Miami were hereditary enemies of the Illinois. The Iroquois were especially hostile to the Ottawas and Saulters.* The Neutral Nation, kindred of the Rat's people, had made war on the Sauk and Foxes before the white men came to upset the continent.

He feared the guns of the whites. His own men were sick from their debauch and had no guns. He fiercely declared:

"The dead must be covered. We must have cloth, powder, axes and knives."

Carcajou promptly replied:

"The Wolverene always covers the bones of a friend. Bring me a piece of smooth bark and burn the end of a stick. I will send a talk across the river to the fort. Goods will be given to cover the dead man."

The Rat had great respect for the written word, so much white magic. One man brought the bark while another charred the ends of sticks. With a flourish that was characteristic of one ever inclined to making dramatic gestures Carcajou wrote a few lines and handed the bark to the chief, saying—

"There is the talk that will cover your dead."

"What does the talk say?" asked the chief.

"That a great chief has a dead man to be covered. That Carcajou orders the white chief Du Lhut to give presents," said Carcajou.

Brouwer bitterly broke out:

"Now you've brought us to a pretty fix! Du Lhut will send soldiers to lay us by the heels."

"You think you are wise like an owl because you hoot," sneered Carcajou. "If it were not for me you'd be in a kettle."

"Undoubtedly Monsieur Du Lhut would pay more respect to a message from me," moodily suggested Chartier.

*Chippewas.

Carcajou's anger became amusement.

"The blessed *noblesse!* A command here; a command there. Behold! Men trot their legs off to obey. But have hope, M'sieur de Niagara. Old Papa will point his medicine bag toward the fort and all will be well."

"Yes, yes," eagerly assured La Blanche. "I will open the bag. And I shall go to Mackinac with you, my Carcajou. You are a great man. If the presents don't come they'll do harm to old Papa."

But Brouwer was not done. In Huron he reminded them:

"Then let the new ax be sent with the message. Not long ago it was in the fort. Du Lhut should know that ax."

"You talk like a fool!" grated Carcajou. "Would you put our heads on poles? Let the Seneca man bring the keg. We must go."

The Rat said:

"The ax shall be sent with the talk. The dead man must be covered very deep. Onontio did nothing to help the Ottawas when the Iroquois made them paddle by the fort at Montreal and sing their death songs."

CHAPTER III

CARCAJOU IS ANNOYED

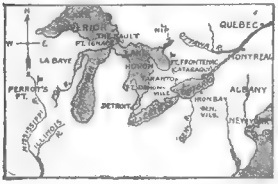
THROUGHOUT the traverse of the Narrows and Lake St. Claire dissension increased between the white men. Carcajou and Papa La Blanche found themselves opposed to Brouwer and Turcot. Chartier was siding first with one, then with the other. The difference remained a state of mind and at the most found expression in talk. Carcajou was sardonic and sneering; Brouwer was gruff and gave the impression of awaiting a more suitable time before baldly stating his grievance. He remained in the canoe with Carcajou. When they camped Turcot kept near him and glared murderously at the Wolverene when he could do so unobserved.

Chartier was puzzled and much annoyed. He sensed the friction but could not discover the cause. The Seneca man listened and watched and was always close to the young Frenchman. His gloomy face revealed savage anticipation when sharp words were exchanged between the two fugitives; but for the sake of their common welfare neither cared to precipitate a quarrel.

Had Carcajou been asked to tell what it was all about he could not have answered. He simply knew there was something in Brouwer's bearing which irritated him. Chartier secretly asked the Seneca the cause of the smoldering ill-will. Dead Bear laconically told him:

"Black wampum hangs between them. Brouwer wants to say something, but is too wise. The Wolverene feels Brouwer is thinking bad thoughts about him, and his heart is hot."

They passed the lofty forests and fine meadows along the Narrows without drinking what remained of La B anche's brandy. Turcot suggested several times that they



pause for a day and have a feast and drink, but Carcajou scowled a refusal. Brouwer was one with him in wishing the brandy to remain in the keg. Each feared that the drink would bring their repressed animosity to the surface and result in an explosion.

After leaving Saginaw Bay Chartier found the straggling, stunted growth depressing. The wild vines disappeared, and he missed them.

At last they passed Michillimackinac, a limestone rock standing three hundred feet above the water, where dwelt subsidiary spirits placed there by Nanabozho, the Algonquin conception of the Supreme Being. But it is not the island of Mackinac that Nanabozho preferred for his abode. One must go to Mackinac at Point St. Ignace on the mainland opposite the island to visit that.

The four miles across the strait were made in impatient haste, like that of men who hurry to escape from prison. Point St. Ignace was a favorite rendezvous for French traders, for many Hurons and four subtribes of the Ottawas left their families there during the winter hunt and in summer found life easy.

After Father Marquette established a mission in the Ottawa village at the point and the traders flocked in, the Indians discovered they need not go on long hunts to live in comfort. Their birch-bark canoes were in great demand at from two to three hundred livres apiece. They were paid a shirt for two sheets of bark for a cabin roof. There was a ready market for wild fruits and French strawberries, as well as for whitefish, trout and other fish. The young men brought back great quantities of game from the summer hunt, and in the winter, the season for collecting furs, they easily secured large quantities of pelts and much fat and flesh of bears and deer.

While the Ottawa tribes imitated their Huron neighbors in customs and rules of conduct and thereby eliminated much of their former rudeness they did not copy the Huron trait of preparing for the morrow. Instead, improvident as the Saulteurs, they were often hungry in a land of plenty. The Hurons seldom suffered from poverty and were superior to neighboring and visiting tribes, being politic, proud, more refined in conversation, though they were often treacherous.

It was to St. Ignace that La Salle sailed in the *Griffon*, and there he found some of the men he had sent ahead to establish a trading post on the Illinois but who had deserted and stole four thousand livres' worth of his merchandise. The fort was the first of three to be erected at the strait and was to last a few more years before being transferred to the southern shore; and nearly a hundred years would pass before it would be shifted to Mackinac Island.

At the time the two canoes were drawn ashore Captain Morel de la Durantaye was commandant of the palisaded fort. He succeeded Nicolas Perrot as governor-general of all the Upper Lakes country. Without a word to Brouwer, Carcajou gathered up his rifle and pack and started toward the Ottawa village, followed by La Blanche.

"M'sieur intends to keep my rifle?" Brouwer called after him.

Carcajou wheeled and replied:

"He intends to keep *his* rifle. M'sieur Runaway trades like an Indian. He trades and then wants his trade back. He forgets he traded a gun for his life on the Niagara Portage."

"But I got nothing for my small Huron belt."

Carcajou glided back to him, his eyes reflecting the rage he was trying to suppress. In a low voice he demanded:

"Make your talk so plain that any one can understand it. What did I have to do with the loss of your belt?"

"I have not yet said you had anything to do with it," muttered Brouwer, also striving to master the desire to satisfy his mounting anger.

Carcajou was silent for a bit then said:

"No one can stop your thoughts. But just as sure as I went to confession in Quebec I will stick an ax in your head if you ever dare say I stole your miserable wampum. Carcajou needs no wampum. Without even a *rassade* he is welcome in any red lodge up here. Sometime m'sieur will dream he has a knife in his throat and will wake up to find himself dead."

Brouwer was not lacking in courage, and the veins stuck out like whipcords while he struggled to hold himself in check.

"I will remember your threat. I will remember my lost belt," he finally said and turned on his heel and walked back to where the Seneca and Chartier were preparing to carry their packs to the fort.

Turcot scuttled away to the woods behind the village. Papa La Blanche waited to walk with Carcajou. As these two advanced toward the village Carcajou's bearing was elastic, and a smile illumined his brown face. He told his aged companion:

"I must change these skin clothes for the gay ones I wore at the Niagara Portage. Ah, old Papa; wait till you see me dressed in the long breeches! Then, by and by, after that runaway renegade has finished his talk at the fort I will go and pay my respects. You can bring me word of anything said about me. If the long traverse had lasted another day I would have broken that Dutch Englishman's head."

"Some one should have cut his throat before he could have told the Indian fishermen at Saginaw that the Iroquois were laying down a war path out here," mumbled La Blanche.

"It was a foolish talk. But he was a greater fool to hint I took his miserable belt. There would be some dignity in being accused of stealing a few thousand livres in beaver. But a miserable string of Huron wampum! *Mon Dieu!*"

Old Papa turned to one side. Carcajou caught his wrist. Papa explained:

"An Ottawa woman seems to be lonely, my Carcajou. She turns her eyes on me. She is a girl. I will talk with her people and buy her."

"Come, come, Old Nonsense. She looks at Carcajou. And what have you to trade for her? Not a *rassade*. I will not even let you have the brandy. Can't you ever learn anything? Haven't red women made enough trouble for you?"

"I will bind myself to hunt for her people a year, two or three years. Yes, she is worth it," muttered the old man, his libidinous gaze following the girl and noting the lodge she entered.

Carcajou released his hold and turned to watch Brouwer and Chartier pass inside the palisade while the Seneca man stretched himself in the sun. When he turned about La Blanche was disappearing among the lodges.

"No sooner out of purgatory than he is warm to get back in," muttered Carcajou.

He advanced, contemplating a rescue of the old man by violence, when he heard French voices singing beyond the village and close to the forest. He forgot La Blanche, and his eyes glistened. He rounded the village and paused to smile at the sight of three shaggy fellows seated by a kettle. They were singing a canoe song. As he watched, one of them jumped up and danced like a Chippewa around the kettle and was heartily cheered by his companions.

Carcajou forgot all but the fun ahead of him. With the piercing scream of the panther he ran toward them, all notions of shifting to his finery forgotten. They saw the keg on his shoulder; and one, a very swarthy fellow, cried out:

"Ho! It is Carcajou. He comes with a talk in a keg."

The one who had given the Chippewa dance began pounding a medicine drum procured by trade or theft from some northern Chippewa village. Carcajou slowed down to a walk and told himself:

"Le Picard. He's a bold one. But he'll try none of his tricks with a Wolverene."

HE GRINNED amiably on recognizing Dubeau, son of a Huron woman and a Frenchman and said to be the strongest man in all the Upper Lakes country if not in all of New France.

He frowned on beholding the third man, John Black, name assumed, a renegade from the English colonies and wanted for murder.

"Very good. There'll be some fun," muttered Carcajou as he advanced, keeping time with the *tum-tum, boom-boom* of the medicine drum. "That Durantaye will be outside the palisade, uneasy until I tell him all is well. But he can wait."

The Picard, so called because he was a native of Picardy and backward about using his family name, abandoned the drum to relieve Carcajou of the keg. Carcajou waved him aside, saying:

"All in good time, my friend. Before we drink I must make myself look like a chief. I have come from Quebec and have gay things to wear when I go to call on the commandant."

"Are you afraid we will drink from the keg while waiting for you?" sneered Black.

"I am afraid you would drink it all. Then I should have to break your neck," cheerfully answered Carcajou.

Black scowled venomously. The Picard laughed joyously. Dubeau slowly stretched his brawny arms, doubled them to swell the enormous biceps and sighed—

"I would rather find a man who can make me trouble than to find a dozen kegs."

"You shall have your share of the keg if you are able to drink it after I have given you some trouble, Big Bones," assured Carcajou. "I do not trust this Picard with a keg. I would not trust this runaway man with my life. You shall watch the keg, Big Bones, while I dress."

"If you are as wise as they say you are you will not dress like a chief until after we've had our fun," advised Dubeau, his small eyes glittering.

"On my faith, Dubeau! But you have a head. Of course. But I may be called away any moment. M'sieur Durantaye will be hungry to hear my talk when he learns I am here. Even now he is saying:

" 'Where is my Carcajou? Beg him to attend. I would have his advice. . I am in trouble.' "

"See here, Carcajou, I will give you a good talk. Better see the commandant before you have fun with me," honestly advised Dubeau.

"You talk like a loon, sounding like wolves but all noise. We will have our fun first. I shall treat you rough, Dubeau."

The half-breed smiled contentedly and doubled and stretched his mighty arms. None who knew him would fight him with empty hands. As he watched Carcajou strip to the waist he almost felt an affection for him.

"Be rough," he pleaded as he threw aside his blanket and stood up in his moccasins.

He was naked except for his breechcloth. His biceps were those of an English smith. His neck was so short and thick that his head appeared to be resting on his massive shoulders. He was unable to hold his arms close to his sides and carried them akimbo.

"You're a man, Carcajou," he added. "I shall hurt you, but a wolverene does not care for hurts. Give me a good fight and I'll be your friend for life."

Carcajou surveyed him shrewdly. They had never met in combat.

"Just how shall we amuse ourselves, my Dubeau? I shall get the best of you; but I want you to have every advantage. Name the conditions."

Dubeau chuckled hoarsely, his eyes, inherited from his mother, agleam with anticipation.

"If I do not kill you I shall love you," he cried in a booming voice. "You fight like a wolverene. I will fight like a bear. All I ask is to finish the talk and come to these arms."

Several Ottawa men were watching the scene from the edge of their village, but were not caring to venture nearer. The Picard beat his medicine drum enthusiastically. Black, the renegade, urged—

"Break his neck, Dubeau."

"If I have to do that I shall always love him," said Dubeau. "I am ready, my wolverene."

"Come along, big bear, if your heart is still strong."

The two advanced toward each other. Carcajou, wearing only his moccasins and thigh leggings, moved lightly with shifting steps. Dubeau came with awkward, lumbering steps, careless of finesse if he could but come to grips. When they were within reach of each other Dubeau grunted in contentment and thrust forth a hand to grip Carcajou by the shoulder.

"Tear the muscles out!" yelled Black.

In a flash Carcajou was under Dubeau's arm, had seized the wrist with his left hand and the hand with his right and, violently

twisting in opposite directions would have broken the wrist bones had not Dubeau wrenched himself loose.

"That is a white man's trick," he growled, a feral light coming into his small eyes.

"A wolverene's trick," taunted Carcajou, lightly dancing out of reach. "And it nearly trapped you, my big bear."

"Yes? Try it again and stop running away," invited Dubeau, advancing and stretching his terrible right arm before him. "Come closer and learn a bear's trick. Don't fight by standing far off and making faces."

"If I come closer you will squeeze me," laughed Carcajou.

"There are Indian boys who can run faster than I. If you want a race call for the Picard," sneered Dubeau.

So swiftly did Carcajou maneuver that the spectators sensed only a blurred suggestion of motion. He was a bronzed streak; and he was under the outstretched arm and, stooping low, had gripped the muscular legs and had torn them from the ground, toppling his man backward, and was out of reach before Dubeau realized what had happened.

"Sometimes it is best not to overtake the man you chase," laughed Carcajou.

Dubeau slowly got to his feet and quietly said:

"Another trick. But why didn't you jump on me and end the fight?"

"Why should I hurt you and spoil the fun, old bear?" retorted Carcajou, dancing almost within reach of the hooked fingers and then away.

"My feet ache from walking after you," growled Dubeau, coming to a halt.

Carcajou advanced invitingly, a mocking smile on his dark face. He poked forward a hand and slapped Dubeau on the nose. Dubeau waited for the derisive slap to be repeated, his gaze very hopeful. He even lowered his arm to invite a repetition. Back and forth danced Carcajou a few times, then feinted to tap Dubeau on the nose. With a growl Dubeau grabbed at the partly extended hand and was instantly gripped by the wrist and yanked forward with a force that would have dislocated any shoulder less strong than his. As it was he almost fell on his knees, but Carcajou kept away.

"You should have finished me," he muttered. "You are afraid of me, Wolverene. If I can sink my hooks into your flesh!"

"I have been fighting like a wolverene," politely explained Carcajou, dancing around the massive figure. "But look here, Dubeau: You want me to come to grips? You forget a wolverene has claws and knows how to use them? Now look at me. Last night I had a war dream. I am very bold."

And to the amazement of the spectators he invited defeat by deliberately walking up to his man, his hands hanging loosely at his sides.

"Fool!" thundered Dubeau, clamping both hands on the naked shoulders with a terrific *smack!*

But even as the terrible fingers started to dig deep into the bronzed flesh and rip loose the corded muscles Carcajou's right fist came up under the unprotected chin with a smashing force that rocked the man's head back and sent him reeling.

"*Mon Dieu!*" mumbled Carcajou, marveling that the man did not fall on his back. "That would break the neck of any man except Dubeau."

"That is another trick I must look out for, my Carcajou," slowly said Dubeau.

But now he remained in his tracks for a few moments and twisted his head about as if to make sure his neck was not injured. Then he was coming on again.

Now all the Ottawa men in the village were eagerly watching the fight from a distance, with their women and children standing behind them. Papa La Blanche, disturbed in his latest wooing, came hurrying onto the scene, shouting his war cry. Carcajou warned him:

"Keep away, Old Nonsense. Two men are deciding something."

Papa La Blanche squatted on the ground and fumbled with the mouth of his medicine bag. Carcajou walked backward, now moving in a short circle. Dubeau plodded after him and kept muttering:

"If I once get my hands on you! If I once get my hands on you!"

"It's not safe to put your hands on a wolverene until you've killed him," reminded Carcajou, slowly retreating and occasionally darting his gaze to one side.

"You are out of tricks. You are trying to make my feet ache."

With his forest scream Carcajou leaped inside the outstretched arms, locked his arms about Dubeau's middle and swung

him clear of the ground. Dubeau grinned ferociously. He had his wish. It made no difference to him if he fell underneath his opponent. He got his fist under Carcajou's chin and showed his white teeth as he began pushing the head up and back.

Carcajou knew it was a matter of seconds before his neck snapped if he could not overcome the pressure. Papa La Blanche was calling on various red deities of the air, earth and water and opened the medicine bag wider. As if hit by an ax Carcajou fell backward, his knees drawn up; and with a heave and a thrust he hurled Dubeau over his head.

He was on his feet first and muttered:

"*Ma foi!* My backbone is pulled out! I am inches taller."

The Indians clapped their hands to their mouths to express astonishment. The Picard crazily pounded the medicine drum and filled Dubeau's blood with fire. Black exulted:

"Good! Good! Kill the boaster! Kill him!"

"Almost finished you that time, Carcajou," warned Dubeau as he climbed to his feet.

"It is plain I must try another trick," panted the *coureur de bois*.

"Next time you will be whipped or torn to pieces," warned Dubeau.

Carcajou saved his breath and resumed stepping away from his man, but always moving in a circle. Inwardly he was telling himself:

"This is a terrible fellow. I did not believe what they said of him. He is strong as a moose. I must out-trick him. A wolverene is more cunning that a stupid moose."

He glanced to one side and was nearly seized by the hooked fingers. As it was they raked his face, drawing blood.

"By ——! You put your mark on him!" bellowed Black in English. "Finish him off!"

Carcajou put a hand to his face and stared at the blood as he backed away and cried:

"Be very careful, Dubeau. I am about to play another trick."

"You've tried all your best ones," grunted Dubeau, beginning to feel almost amiable now that he had drawn blood.

Carcajou began to exercise great care in planting each backward step. The Picard beat the drum more softly after the custom of the Chippewa about to go into battle.

Old La Blanche instantly shouted:

"*Bwan! Bwan!*" the war-cry of the Chippewa in an open fight.

Then in French he screamed:

"You are a kingbird, little Carcajou. You attack hawks, owls and eagles. You drive them away! Fight, little kingbird!"

"I am a wolverene!" suddenly shouted Carcajou in a terrible voice, and he made as if to throw himself upon his opponent.

Dubeau involuntarily halted. Almost instantly Carcajou had leaped a pace backward and over the brandy keg. As his feet struck the ground and Dubeau was about to lunge after him, the keg was kicked forward, striking Dubeau on the shins. The blow was violent and the shins sensitive, and before he knew it Dubeau was bending forward; in that moment Carcajou completed his ruse by jumping upon him and darting behind him and securing a hold under the chin and around the short neck that would have strangled an ordinary man almost at the first pressure.

Dubeau was not defeated, although he felt his head being torn out by the roots. He clawed wildly to secure a grip on his elusive antagonist and hugged his chin and stamped and kicked at Carcajou's feet and legs.

With a violent wrench first to one side and then the other Carcajou put forth all his strength and hurled his man to the ground. Dubeau's head smashed against the keg, and only the thick mat of hair and the thick skull saved him from being brained. He rolled over on one side and was motionless for a few moments, or long enough for Carcajou to scream like a panther and leap high in the air and crack his heels together. Then he was on his knees, examining Dubeau's hurts. Blood was seeping through the long, coarse hair. Dubeau came to himself and flung his arms about Carcajou's waist.

"No, no, my tame bear!" Carcajou reminded him. "No clawing a man who brings aid. The fight is over. Your spirit has been wandering around the moon. You lost the fight."

Dubeau sat up and blinked stupidly around him; then exclaimed:

"How long was I dead? I can still hear church bells ringing. You will not fight any more?"

"Not now," firmly replied Carcajou,

giving a hand and dragging Dubeau to his feet. "I have a big talk for the commandant. And I must dress like a chief. And there is the keg waiting to be opened."

"But some time? Come! You're a man. Promise we shall fight again some time."

"But of course," heartily agreed Carcajou. "There's blood on the keg. Your head must have hit it."

"After you kicked it against my legs. You have many tricks, my wolverene. But next time there will be no kegs to help you."

But he bore no ill-will, and he grinned broadly as he found blood in his hair and as he watched Carcajou putting on his long breeches and white skirt. Papa La Blanche stole up to his friend and whispered:

"It was not the keg, little kingbird. You were losing the fight until I came and opened my medicine bag and pointed it at him."

Brouwer came running up, and Carcajou glared at him wrathfully. Before he realized the other's intention Brouwer had seized his hand and was pressing it warmly and asking—

"Can you ever forgive me, old friend?"

"Eh? You're drunk," muttered Carcajou, staring into the flushed face. "And 'old friend'? 'Forgive'? *Mon Dieu!* But you're drunk. Of course that is it."

"No, no! We've been drinking at the fort. Chartier is asleep. But I have my wits. It's that cursed belt."

"The Huron belt? Of course. The one you almost accused me of stealing," said Carcajou sternly, releasing his hand.

"Strike me on the head for being such a fool," lamented Brouwer. "The Seneca man picked it up at the camping place on the Narrows while we were greeting the Rat. Like an Indian he never said a word, although he knew I was looking for it and was worried. Now he gives it to me. I don't know what to make of him. Tell me you forgive me?"

"I'd almost forgive the —— if he were as polite as m'sieur," muttered Carcajou.

He scowled in an attempt to fathom the Seneca man's silence during the long traverse to Mackinac. An Indian was never direct in the white man's way.

"That's it," he murmured. "He wanted to make trouble. For me? For M'sieur Runaway? No one will ever know."

"I think he was trying to make us enemies to each other," eagerly suggested Brouwer.

"See here, M'sieur Brouwer; I hold no ill will. If it had been anything except theft we could laugh at it. I steal from his gracious Majesty; that is expected. Many Frenchmen steal from him. But not from M'sieur Brouwer or M'sieur Any One. And after men have disagreed as we have and one has the same as said the other is a thief, why, those two men can never feel the same toward each other. Of course not. My good Dubeau and I have been trying to kill each other; but we had respect for each other. Between m'sieur and Carcajou it is like this; you can't smash a beautiful vase to pieces and still have the vase.

"But there are lots of woods and water up here. A great deal of room. One could hide the moon up here. We will part acquaintances, but no ill will from me toward you. The vase is in too many little pieces; some are lost. You have talked with the commandant, and young Anjou is drunk?"

"At some length. Chartier is asleep. I told about Rooseboom and McGregorie coming to trade. Everything is planned to trap them here."

"He asked about Carcajou?"

"He said he would see you soon. Chevalier de Tonty is with him. They are deciding how best to arouse the Ottawas to go against the Iroquois according to Denonville's orders of last fall and winter. The Indians will be stubborn. They have not forgotten how La Barre got them down to the Niagara and then sent them home, saying he had made peace with the Iroquois."

Then with a grand air he added:

"I believe I understand all that. Of course I must find time to look in on the commandant."

"If he should ask for me before I show up make him my profound compliments and tell him I have whipped Dubeau and am trying to get drunk on too little brandy. I regret, m'sieur, I can not ask you to partake of the keg again. But there is not enough brandy except for a very dear enemy, or a very close friend. I am glad I did not steal the belt in m'sieur's estimation. *Adieu.*"

BROUWER walked back toward the village. The keg was opened, but Carcajou was slow to feel the effects of the brandy. The sun sank into the forest. A fire was kindled.

If Carcajou failed to respond to the cheer in the keg the others were merry enough. The Pipe and Tomahawk Dance of the Chippewa was given with much spirit so that, as the Picard put it, the medicine drum might not feel lonely. They danced the Buffalo Dance of the Sauk and Fox Indians, Papa La Blanche distinguishing himself by imitating a buffalo with a robe and two sticks for horns. The Picard put on a robe and tried to hook La Blanche.

Carcajou watched and smiled, then would become lost in deep thought. He could not erase the perplexed crease from his tanned forehead. Suddenly he put down his cup, shook Papa La Blanche from his robe, took him aside and commanded:

"Listen to me, Old Nonsense. Go at once among the Ottawa lodges and find out if Brouwer gave a belt to any of the Ottawas. Now look sharp and come back here."

"I go, my Carcajou, and I will find my brandy finished when I return," sighed the old man.

And as he made off through the dusk he sang a Sauk and Fox song because the mournful cadence of their songs was in keeping with his disappointed spirit.

Now Carcajou was transformed back to his old boisterous self. He was rampant with war cries of different nations. He was cajoling, threatening and lapsing into teary sentiment until Dubeau was impelled to cry out:

"Now I am glad I did not tear you to pieces, little man. You shall never get out of my sight again. I will follow you to Hudson's Bay, to the sea in the south. I can uproot the strongest tree on the point."

There followed more braggadocio, more singing and dancing and pantomime learned from the red nations, more sentimental reminiscences; then Carcajou suddenly seemed to collapse, hiccuped an apology and staggered away toward the village. Before coming to the outer circle of lodges he sat down and remained very quiet. He heard soft steps approaching and crouched low. The man was abreast of him before he came to his feet and softly said—

"Not so fast, Old Nonsense."

"Is the brandy finished?"

"Of course. But I can always steal a little miserable keg of brandy for you. I say it on the pipe. Have you brought me a talk, or shall I crack your dry bones, old wife-hunter?"

"There is a lonely Ottawa woman who thinks well of me," whispered La Blanche. "I tried to get in where they were holding a secret lodge but could not. But the woman heard talk when she carried the kettle of meat and left it outside. A Huron man was talking with the Ottawa men. She did not hear much of the talk but enough to know the Huron agreed to carry a calumet decorated with plumes and several collars of wampum to the east. If I can learn more I will run to tell you, my Carcajou. And can you find me some brandy tonight?"

"I can find a lake of brandy when I will. But why give brandy to an old fool who forgets to do as he is told? What about Brouwer and his belt?"

"I was saving that to trade for a few pots to be delivered to me tonight," sighed Papa La Blanche. "The lonely Ottawa woman saw M'sieur Brouwer talk with a Huron man in an Ottawa lodge and give him a belt of three strands."

"You old rascal! To keep that from me! You shall have your brandy tonight. I say it on the pipe. But I ought to break your head."

Carcajou started toward the fort, skirting the village; and as he loitered before the entrance in the stockade a soldier caught up a torch from an iron holder and advanced to him, followed by the officer of the guard. The latter demanded—

"Is this the fellow we want?"

The sentinel, an *habitant* and familiar with Carcajou's history, replied—

"This is the *coureur de bois* known as Carcajou."

"The greatest *coureur de bois* in all New France," corrected Carcajou, speaking in the manner of a chief.

"You follow me inside and open that bag of talk to the commandant," ordered the officer.

"*Bon Dieu!* Such a big voice, and such a little man!" exclaimed Carcajou, wagging his head as if perplexed.

"He is drunk. Perhaps in the morning—" murmured the sentinel.

"Silence. Come along, Wolverene man. We'll see how sharp your claws are after you've faced our commandant."

"Name of names! But this man has dreamed of eagles. I am afraid of him," muttered Carcajou, and his ludicrous

simulation of great fear caused the sentinel to turn his head. Then the sentinel was remarking—

"This man has just whipped Dubeau."

"I can whip the world, my little one," assured Carcajou. "Lead the way, my fort soldier. The commandant seeks my advice."

"May you be ordered to 'pass by the arms' (executed), big boaster," growled the officer of the guard as he conducted Carcajou into the fort.

CARCAJOU found himself standing before a rude table, his head nearly touching the low ceiling. The room served as headquarters and living quarters for Captain Durantaye, who, with another man, was seated at the table.

Carcajou blinked in the candlelight and rocked back and forth on his toes and heels. Both men were clean shaven and wore their hair long. Durantaye's complexion was not weathered so darkly as his companion's. He stared at Carcajou sternly, and it was obvious that he was prejudiced against the bush loper.

The second man, at the end of the table, was colored by the elements to the hue of an Ottawa. His long hair, somewhat bleached by the sun, fell in ringlets to his broad shoulders. What focused Carcajou's gaze was the gloved right hand supporting the strong chin. Henry de Tonty, Italian knight, La Salle's first lieutenant and faithful follower, and always faithful to Louis and France, had lost his hand by a grenade at the siege of Messina and had replaced it with one of copper. Among the savages he was known as "the man with the iron hand." More than one Indian head he had broken with his metal fist, and his reputation for possessing a marvelous medicine was wide-spread. His wide journeyings for and with La Salle had baked and tanned his skin to the color of leather. He was more widely versed in forest ways than Durantaye and therefore was entitled to Carcajou's respect next to Nicolas Perrot. The latter would always come first, as the outlawed *coureur de bois* held him to be the greatest of all woods runners. But Tonty was one of the greatest captains of the West, and in staring at him Carcajou almost forgot the commandant. Tonty did not attempt to conceal a slight smile of amusement as he gazed at the tall and somewhat unsteady figure.

"You are called Carcajou," began Durantaye sternly.

"If you will be so good as to permit, Monseigneur," murmured Carcajou with a low bow.

"Come, come. You know better than that. Name the three in New France who have the right to that title."

"The Bishop of Quebec, the Governor and the intendant," replied Carcajou.

"Then let's have no more nonsense. You were running away from soldiers when you made the Niagara portage."

"If m'sieur says so, it is so. I will believe him next to the Church," firmly replied Carcajou.

"One of your traveling companions says so."

"Ah, that runaway Dutch-Englishman!" cried Carcajou, scowling savagely. "And the villain would offer me a peace pipe. *Cochon!*"

"No abuse," warned Durantaye. "My informant is my guest, Monsieur Chartier. It was his duty as a good citizen of France to tell that you were pursued by his Excellency's soldiers."

"Young Anjou, eh? He must have been very drunk on fort brandy. *Ma foi!* I wonder if he was drunk enough to tell, he, too ——"

He broke off and stared blankly at Tonty. After all, his case would not be improved by repeating the rescue of the Seneca galley-slave. Young Anjou was only a boy. Boys babbled much when in drink and often betrayed themselves. And he sang so pathetically of a maid!

"Go on," directed Durantaye.

"Eh? Where was I? Being chased by his Excellency's rabbits. I saw no soldiers at the portage. As a good son of the Church I went to Quebec for mass and confession. I can go another year in the forest and not lose my soul. I serve the King, Louis the Magnificent, messieurs. And I am ever the dutiful child of the great Durantaye."

"Your service consists of smuggling French furs to Albany," Durantaye quietly reminded him. Tonty's face lost its smile.

Carcajou spread out his hands in an eloquent gesture of helplessness and cried:

"If his gracious Majesty knew the truth he would say: 'You are simple, good Carcajou. You are common. The Throne does not expect as much from you as it does from the *noblesse*. You walk according to your

poor light. It is not surprizing if you stumble ——,'"

"Enough. You not only have smuggled, but you have traded without a permit," impatiently broke in the commandant.

"But, m'sieur I did have a *congé*. It permitted me to take one canoe and eight men and trade for one year."

"Very good. Let's see it."

Carcajou stared at him foolishly and complained:

"My head bothers me at times. It keeps me from being a great man. The *congé*? I remember. I sold it for twelve hundred francs. But, m'sieur, the law gives me that right."

"So you admit trading after selling your *congé*," pressed the commandant.

Tonty shifted his hand to hide his smile.

"But be so good, my commandant, as to remember the men with one-year permits staying in the bush for two, three years. And others out here who never saw a permit," cried Carcajou.

"None of that. It's you who is up before me," Durantaye harshly reminded him.

Carcajou hung his head and confessed:

"It is the sad truth, m'sieur, I got into a bit of trouble after selling my *congé*. So much beaver was stored in Montreal and Quebec that the price fell to almost nothing. Some one told me the Farmer of the Beaver would buy no more. Being simple and common, I thought I was within the law to sell a few furs to Albany merchants, enough to keep me in powder and lead. For even the poor and simple must live, m'sieur."

"You convict yourself of being a bush loper."

"But I have been to Mass and confession. I am a good man now. I saw my betters making a fine profit from furs. I thought I was right in making a living. I can now see those Albany merchants are sons of the Evil One. Ah, m'sieur, you do not know how they tempt one! May the good God keep you from temptation!

"Why, look here, m'sieur: In Albany they paid forty pounds of lead, or a red blanket, or a big coat, for one beaver. In Montreal they must have two beaver for a blanket or coat, and three beaver for the lead. Their evil is astounding. Now my eyes are open. I spit on them. Two beaver will buy a gun at Albany, but I will pay five at Montreal. I can get eight pounds of powder for one beaver at Albany; but beaver are plenty, and I will pay four at Montreal. Albany gives six pots of sugarcane rum for a beaver. Montreal has never given as much as one pot.

"Another snare to catch a simple fellow is Albany's willingness to take all pelts at the same price, making no difference as to the quality. At Albany ——"

"Perdition take Albany! If it doesn't, New France surely will!" wrathfully interrupted the commandant. "You dare try to vindicate your smuggling because English money was ready to buy you?"

"But I never traded except for a little rum which I drank myself," defended Carcajou. "And now I am a good man. My eyes are open. Simple, yes; but no longer a bush loper. I didn't have to come here, m'sieur. I had all North America to hide in. But I have been to confession, and I would serve France."

"So?" grimly snapped Durantaye. "Well, go on and finish hanging yourself."

Carcajou cast a worried glance at Tonty and found the knight's face hard and cold.

"Even if I stick my head through a noose it is my duty to come here and tell you this, messieurs," he said. "Captain Rooseboom even now is paddling up the lakes to trade with our red children. He is followed by McGregorie, another of Dongan's traders. When I learned that I said to myself:

"'Come, Carcajou, thou simple one. This is no time to think of thine own pelt. The great Durantaye must learn of this bad business even if he has thee hung up in a cage on top of Cape Diamond. Thy duty, poor Carcajou, is to thy most gracious ——'"

"Silence. We know all this and are ready to receive the English traders. And you—such a loyal son!—forgot to report it and thought only of getting drunk. You forgot your mission until you were feeling the noose, and left it for the man Brouwer to tell us."

"But not so drunk as to lose my head, which is simple at times, m'sieur," quickly defended Carcajou. "I drank some brandy that I might learn the truth. Of course the Dutch-Englishman told you of the English traders. Young Anjou, the one we call M'sieur de Niagara, could have told you as much; or that rascal Turcot. Any one could have told you that.

"But only Carcajou can tell you this: If Rooseboom and McGregorie reach Fort

Mackinac with their goods and rum you can not put a hand on them. Once their canoes land at the Point of St. Ignace then all the French here, at Detroit, at La Baye and on the Illinois, will be massacred. That is the news I risk the noose to bring."

This dramatic statement, although presented with much of the theatrical, caused Durantaye and Tonty to stare in amazement at the speaker.

"*Bon Dieu!* Let him explain," muttered Tonty.

"Explain, rascal, or you'll kiss the head breaker at sunrise!" cried the commandant.

Carcajou rapidly continued:

"The two traders must be captured before they get here. They must be made to look like very small men in the Indians' eyes. Our Ottawas are up to mischief. They have been smoking war tobacco with the Hurons. They plan to send a calumet with plumes and collars to the Iroquois, asking for a lasting peace and the friendship of the English. For that peace and friendship they will trade the lives of all the French on the Upper Lakes. So much did your Carcajou learn in the village of the Ottawas while so very drunk."

THE two captains stared at each other in silence. Both were remembering the great difficulty in raising the "Army of the South" for La Barre's campaign against the Iroquois in 1684. Durantaye was ordered to command the Ottawas in that campaign and had his ax returned by them, also by the Missisauga, the Saulteurs, the Kickapoos and the tribes at La Baye. Only the Hurons would accept the ax until Perrot took over the task and finally persuaded those who had refused it.

As a result of the La Barre campaign the tribes of the Upper Lakes returned embittered against the French. Even Perrot, who had the most influence with the tribes, never fully trusted his red allies. If the Hurons were now willing to join the Ottawas in sending the pipe and wampum that Carcajou described the situation was most dangerous.

In a low voice Durantaye asked—

"What proof have you of all this?"

"I sent old Papa La Blanche into the village to learn things. He has married into so many tribes he can go where even Carcajou can not. He told me. Question him. Then there is an Ottawa woman here at the point he wants for a wife. She heard the talk in a secret council. She will not talk to you, but she told old Papa.

"If the two traders are brought in prisoners the Indians will make no treaty with Dongan and the Long House. But if they land and give out their rum, then it will be the *casse-tête* for every Frenchman they can catch."

"I believe the fellow is telling the truth," murmured Tonty.

Durantaye drummed his fingers on the table for a moment, then directed:

"You may go. I shall talk with you again. We may forget about Quebec if you are speaking the truth and do not break the law again. Understand, you volunteered this information and I have made no trade with you. But if you have told the truth and there are no other charges against you I will advise leniency in your affair."

"You know all the badness my simple mind has sent me into, M'sieur Commandant," Carcajou assured him.

He bowed low and turned to depart when Tonty halted him by asking—

"How many men will be required to take you back to Quebec should Monsieur Durantaye find it to be his duty to send you there?"

Carcajou weighed the query for a moment, then answered:

"I went alone, Chevalier. If I gave my word I would go alone again."

"But if sent? How many men?"

"More than there are here at St. Ignace, Chevalier, unless they killed me first. It is a very long traverse."

Tonty laughed in keen delight, thereby saving the outlaw from rebuke. But Durantaye did not relish the bold speech and remarked:

"I am now remembering you failed to tell me about the Iroquois war party sent out here against the Miamis."

"That talk is dead, m'sieur. They were called back. They had six days' start of the messenger, but he traveled fast. The Long House knows his Excellency has many birches and *batteaux* for the summer campaign."

"Will the Iroquois make a fight, or hide in the woods?" harshly inquired Tonty.

"Both. They think the French very weak of heart since La Barre got ready to fight and then didn't. To whip them we

should have more *habitants;* men like Carcajou in place of soldiers from France, who are afraid of the woods."

"*Sapristi!* But you are modest!" exclaimed Tonty.

"I know my place," agreed Carcajou. "In the bush I am a great man."

Durantaye ended the examination by calling in a soldier and directing—

"This man is to have the freedom of the point, but you are to shoot him if he makes to enter a canoe."

"Fine manners!" muttered Carcajou as he followed the soldier from the fort. "If I save his Majesty's life they probably would cut my throat."

AS HE passed outside the palisade Papa La Blanche crept up to him in the darkness and whispered—

"What did they do to our Carcajou?"

"Do? What could they do but thank me for the service I have done for his gracious Majesty and for France?" haughtily answered Carcajou. "See here, Old Nonsense: Does a wolverene poke his head into a trap? Chevalier Tonty thanked me. M'sieur the commandant would have embraced me had I not restrained him. There is talk of making me a seigneur. If you find yourself in trouble speak my name. Say you are under my protection."

"That is good," the aged man sighed in much relief. "I was foolish. I have even worried and moved a canoe down the shore to the west and put a kettle and blankets and a gun in it, and carried your new gun and pack to a spot near the canoe. Now you have authority you will remember the little matter of some brandy?"

"It is nothing. In the morning I will tell Durantaye to send you a keg. By the time you have lived another hundred years you will run away from your shadow. Hiding a canoe and hiding my rifle and pack! What made you such a fool? Tell me quick; then go and bring back my gun and pack."

"It was because of the Frenchman walking through the Ottawa village and asking if you were here. Brouwer told him you were. Ah, there he is! That man entering the palisade. Now I snap my fingers at my fears. He comes to leave thanks for something you have done for him."

"Look here. What's this?" mumbled Carcajou. "I don't know that man. He doesn't walk like a woods-runner. Why don't you say something? If he asked for me didn't he say where he came from?"

"I heard him say he came from Du Lhut's post at the Narrows. I will go now and bring back the canoe."

"You will go to the canoe and wait for me. Stay there all night. Then come back. I think that man comes to say I'm to be made Seigneur of Detroit. Or it may be my rights are only to a cage on Cape Diamond."

Papa La Blanche dutifully set off down the shore. Carcajou glided to the north side of the palisade, climbed it noiselessly and, crouching low, darted beneath the window of Durantaye's room. He was in time to hear the man from Detroit saying:

"So what could I do, Monsieur Durantaye? Captain Du Lhut is still away hunting. I was left in charge. A Tionontati man brought the message and a new French ax. Now that I have sent the gifts I fear I have been tricked and that this man who signs the writing has the goods."

"The writing. Let me see it," bruskly ordered Durantaye.

"It was written on bark with charcoal. Bark is easily broken. So I made an exact copy of it. If monsieur will be so good as to look at the copy."

There was a brief pause; then Durantaye was reading aloud for Tonty's benefit:

"To Monsieur Du Lhut, Commandant at Detroit on the Narrows.

"MONSIEUR:

"You will deliver to the bearer, a Tionontati, cloth, a few knives, some axes and one gun to cover the bones of a Tionontati man killed by some unknown using a new French trade ax, a day ago, on the east shore a bit above l'Isle du Bois Blanc. The Rat was there. He believes some Frenchman from monsieur's post killed the man. The —— must be paid if the dead man is not covered deep. Add one pound of powder for the gun. The Rat is about ready to jump to the English. This is your authority for delivering the goods to the bearer.—CAPTAIN CARCAJOU."

"And I fear he has stolen the goods," repeated the man from the Narrows as the commandant finished his reading.

"I'll wager he has the goods!" exclaimed Tonty with a grim laugh.

"*Sacré bleu!* That rascal is impossible! I'll have him in irons!" savagely exclaimed the commandant.

"But if he spoke correctly about the Rat favoring the English?" queried Tonty.

"Chevalier, I will iron him for not telling

me of this new danger. Maybe I will remove the irons after a few days. But I'll keep him fast until I am satisfied I know all that has happened during his voyage from the Niagara Portage.

"What's this?" Carcajou asked himself. "A wolverene in irons? They're not worth helping. Perrot is the only one who has a head."

He heard them making for the door and cautiously raised his shaggy head. Durantaye was out of the room, and Tonty with the messenger at his heels was passing through the doorway.

"Death of a pig!" muttered Carcajou as he lightly swung through the window. "There's thanks for you! They'll send me to the Iroquois if they keep on."

He was in the room only a moment; then was over the back end of the palisade and running swiftly to the shore west of the post.

He was softly hailed and came to a halt. Papa La Blanche rose from the ground, saying—

"You come in a hurry."

"They insist I return to Quebec to be made a seigneur. I'm going away."

"Then here is all you need, my Carcajou. *Bonne chance.*"

And he pressed a paddle into the Wolverene's hand.

"Now, Careless One, you've forgotten a spare paddle?"

"Two spare paddles are in the birch."

"Thanks, old Papa. And I promised to replace your brandy."

"It is no matter. When we meet again. I will remember."

"But I remember. Carcajou keeps his word. It should be good as it is a gift from the commandant. It was given me in his own room. Now be quiet, old wife-hunter."

And he picked up the old man and placed him gently in the canoe along with the stolen jug, and pushed off.

"Stop! Let me ashore, Carcajou. There is the lonely Ottawa woman ——"

"Yes, yes. Don't tell the stars. I'll save you yet, Old Nonsense. Take a paddle. We're bound for La Baye. If Perrot is not there we will keep on and make the Fox-Wisconsin portage. You'll be safe, never fear, Old Foolish. We'll find Perrot if we have to go to his post on the Mississippi. The Ottawa woman shall not catch you. Be brave. Ah, now they are waking up."

The last as a musket was fired at the fort. Then lights bobbed about as men with torches ran down to the shore and toward the Ottawa village, searching for the Wolverene.

Carcajou stared back at the dark outline of the mountain on the shore of the lake, shaped like a hare, where Nanabozho taught the first men how to make fishing nets. Voices were shouting on the point, and lights streaming to the ancient landing place indicated a search along the shore.

"Hunt your heads off, *canaille!*" gleefully derided Carcajou. "But you'll not see me again till this talk about irons is forgotten. And the Tionontati man got the trade goods! They listen when 'Captain Carcajou' speaks like a chief. Now for Perrot. He has a head. Come now, Old Foolish. Wake up and use that paddle."

With a sigh of resignation Papa La Blanche set to work; the birch shot over the sleeping waters of the strait, and never once did Carcajou bother to look back at the wake of rippling stars and moonbeams.

CHAPTER IV

TO FIND PERROT

AS IF racing against time Carcajou held Papa La Blanche to the work, and although a third man to steer was wanting they made up for this lack by hoisting a light sail and taking advantage of a favorable wind for many hours. From the Manistique River they were also favored by a steady breeze coming from the north; and they held their course until opposite the entrance to La Baye des Puants.

They made a brief halt on Detroit Island and enjoyed a few hours' sleep. There was a large Indian village on the island, but by arriving at nightfall and leaving long before sunrise they escaped the notice of any of the Indians. With a light breeze to assist them they did not land again until they reached the mouth of the Menominee River. Day and night alike they had paddled and sailed, pausing only to stretch their legs, sleep a bit and eat.

Papa La Blanche groaned much and complained often. He called his companion a "madman" to make such tremendous haste. He even accused him of running away from trouble that did not exist.

"*Eh bien*, Old Foolish!" lightly replied Carcajou as they drove their birch up to a small Indian camp. "I was in no hurry. I was trying to save you from the Ottawa woman. Put irons on a wolverene, would they? When they do it will be when the Wolverene has lost his claws and legs. We'll learn something from this camp. They should be Menominee men."

A score of men came down to welcome the travelers, and the first glance was sufficient to tell the Frenchmen they were Menominees, peacefully inclined toward the whites and perhaps the most stalwart and prepossessing of all the aborigines in New France. They were commonly known as the Folles Avoines, or Wild Rice Indians, and were greatly reduced in strength by the hostilities of other neighboring Algonquian tribes.

They greeted Carcajou and La Blanche hospitably, just as at the same post in 1634 they made welcome Nicolet, the first white man to visit them. Some of them knew La Blanche, who represented Carcajou to be a favorite son of Onontio. The bush loper was impatient to learn news of Perrot and could barely compose himself to endure the deliberate custom of eating and smoking before seeking information. While sharing the beliefs and practising the rituals of the Chippewas they used the language of the Sauk in conversing with the travelers. Carcajou attempted to open his talk in Chippewa, Potawatomie and Ottawa, but the Menominee persisted in ignoring these dialects, and La Blanche was forced to act as his friend's interpreter.

The head man of the village was Red Moose, of the Moose clan. He was genial of countenance, and after they had eaten and smoked and he had had a dram of brandy he readily gave the desired information. Perrot, he said, was at his fort on the Mississippi, having just returned from the Sioux country. He had been recalled by Onontio to take a big warpath to the East, just as he had done in 1684. Onontio's messengers had gone to find him before the last snow, but he had been compelled to remain in the Sioux country until canoes could reach him.

Red Moose knew that Perrot had endeavored to enlist allies after reaching his fort and had traveled sixty leagues to the Miami towns and secured their pledge to accompany him to the East. But the Miamis later took back their pledges because the Loups told them the French were planning to betray them to the Iroquois, who would put them in kettles.

After La Blanche had repeated this Carcajou impatiently exclaimed:

"See here! This is a bad talk. Perrot needs me. To think of his going to the Miamis and getting them to accept his tobacco and then refuse to keep their word! I'll get after those Miamis. What are you waiting for, Old Foolish? Think we hurried down here to rest our bones? Ask if the tribes at the bottom of the bay have received a pipe from Perrot."

Papa La Blanche talked several minutes, Red Moose answering promptly. Then Papa explained:

"More than a thousand men are about to start over the Fox and Ouisconching (Wisconsin) portage to carry a club against the Sioux. They are Renards (Foxes), Mascoutens and Kickapoos. They say they will take all the goods at Perrot's fort* and kill him and all his men. They say they will kill all the French on the Upper Lakes."

"*Bon Dieu!* What's this? What's this?" muttered Carcajou, barely able to keep his face composed under the curious scrutiny of the Menominees' mournful eyes. "Look here, Old Nonsense! You were asleep and dreamed. Name of names! Kill all the French! Why, Perrot may have his hair drying on a hoop even now! Make your lazy tongue work."

"I will dig deeper," said La Blanche.

He talked again, and at last turned to his companion and explained:

"Some one has opened a bad medicine bag. The Bay Indians plan to kill all the French they can find. They want the flintlocks Perrot has in his fort. They say Perrot has only four Frenchmen with him and has been trading with their enemies, the Sioux. They say all the French will be hit in the head as soon as the warriors reach the fort. The Moose's heart is heavy. He is afraid they will come and kill all his people after they've killed the French."

"—— grab him for a simpleton!" roared Carcajou. "Doesn't he know Frenchmen are not hit in the head with a red club or ax? Tell him Perrot goes to sleep among enemies and wakes up and laughs at them.

*Left bank of the Mississippi, one mile above Trempeauleau.

Hurry up, Old Slow; ask him the nearest Indian village below here."

After a brief talk Carcajou was informed:

"He says some Fox men are at the Oconto. He says they are returning to their villages on the Fox after hunting through the winter. He does not believe these men know of the path against the Sioux and the French. They reached the Oconto after the last messenger from the Fox River came to the bay."

Carcajou pursed his lips and thought for a moment, then directed:

"Make this talk to Red Moose:

"Onontio sends the Wolverene to tell Red Moose the Fox Portage Indians will kill all the Menominee if they kill Perrot and his men. While Perrot lives they will not dare harm the Menominee, for they know Perrot is the Menominee's elder brother.

"Carcajou is Onontio's favorite son. Onontio did not want him to leave Quebec. He is very tired from bringing a talk from Quebec to Perrot. He wants a long canoe and three men to paddle him to the Oconto. He must move very fast. If he finds no camp at the Oconto he must be paddled to the mouth of the Fox. Perrot, when he comes, will make them presents for this help. Carcajou will leave them his jug of brandy."

Papa La Blanche balked at the last promise and bitterly complained:

"Does my son treat me like this? Will he give away my brandy after making me leave my new Ottawa wife? Is it a good son who gives this and that that belongs to his forest father?"

"Silence, Old Nonsense. Make that talk," thundered Carcajou. "I will steal you more brandy."

The old man sadly made the talk. Red Moose said he must talk with his men aside. Brandy was good, but Fox axes were bad. It would be dangerous work paddling Frenchmen to the Fox River. He withdrew and conferred with some of the older men; then returned to the fire and announced:

"Many of the *Menominiwok ininiwok** have had axes stuck in their heads. They can not lose any more men. They love Onontio and his father, the Great Onontio. But if they go with the French who will be alive to make the winter hunt and bring meat to the old men, women and children? When the *Menominiwok ininiwok* have no meat in the kettle they die before Onontio can help them. Hunger makes their voices weak. Onontio lives far away and does not hear good. The young men are afraid to paddle a canoe even to the Oconto."

La Blanche repeated this and added—

"Now we must do our own paddling; and my old back is broken; my old arms ache."

Carcajou found a piece of bark, fished out a burned stick from the fire and wrote with his customary flourish. The Menominees watched him curiously and with awe. They were one with other tribes in considering the written word to consist of magic. Facing Red Moose and motioning for La Blanche to stand at his side and translate his words, he said:

"Here is a talk from Onontio to Perrot. It says for him to give you presents when he comes to the bay. Perrot will not be killed. The French will not be killed. Give me paddlers and a canoe, and I will leave the talk with you to give Perrot. I will leave the brandy. If your young men are afraid to paddle to the Oconto then some of your women will paddle."

Red Moose and his men gazed longingly at the writing, then at the jug. They talked apart for a minute; then the chief announced:

"Leave the talk and the brandy. The young men will paddle you to the Oconto. But if the Fox camp is at the mouth of the river they will not land."

Carcajou started for the canoes. Papa La Blanche trotted after him, complaining—

"Even his Excellency, the governor, takes time to rest."

"He can rest in safety when he knows such brave fellows as we are out here. The writing on the bark won them over. See what a grand thing it is, old Papa, to know how to write."

"Yes; but some day, my Carcajou, you will write your last order for another man's trade goods."

"Nonsense, Old Foolish." Then to himself: "Upon my faith, but I must be wise. I must not use up all the smooth bark in the woods. But Perrot loves me. He will approve. Besides, I will not tell him I did it. Come, come! Pick up your heels, timid ancient."

And once more they were afloat.

*Red Earth People. Their own name for themselves.

WHEN the three Menominee men smelled smoke they slowed their stroke. When they saw the red flames dancing in the water at the mouth of the river they quickly turned north and paddled with frantic haste until they were a mile above the Oconto and landed the two men. Cursing their timidity, Carcajou felt about with his feet for a shore path. Papa La Blanche found it first; and, weighted down with packs and their weapons, the two hurried along the trail.

"We must be sly, my Carcajou," muttered La Blanche. "I do not remember having a wife among these people."

"That is because you have had so many, old villain. We must be bold instead of sly. These hunters have been away from their village all winter. They will not know as much as the Menominee fear they know. Or why should they be staying here? If we can't get ahead of them we will travel with them until we can. If necessary I will give them orders on some post or trader for some goods."

"You'll write your head off some day, my little son," warned La Blanche.

Carcajou came to a halt and announced:

"This is no time to make their camp. We will make a small fire and eat and get a few hours' sleep and to them in the morning.."

"Now you talk like a man with a head," enthusiastically endorsed La Blanche. Under his breath he murmured, "And may the good saints put it into their hearts to start south before we wake up."

It was the sun, filtering its first rays through the budding branches of the hardwood growth, that aroused Carcajou from his sleep. With an exclamation of disgust he sprang to his feet, caught hold of the edge of his companion's blanket and with a snap of his powerful wrist rolled the sleeper out on the ground.

"Why didn't you wake me up, rascal? If they have left the river I'll cut your head off."

"Why not?" crossly countered La Blanche. "You have taken my brandy. You give away another's trade goods. Why shouldn't you take my head?"

"Faster! Faster!" growled Carcajou, taking the lead with long steps.

He slowed down when he smelled smoke and rejoiced:

"They're still there. They are in no hurry. No talk from their village has found them yet."

Reconnoitering carefully, they beheld two bark lodges side by side, and a third, much smaller, standing on the edge of the growth at some distance.

Carcajou loudly hailed the camp in French. La Blanche repeated it in Mascouten, which is nearly identical with the Fox and Potawatomi dialects. Immediately twelve hunters rushed from the two lodges, carrying spears and clubs, while three had the long trade muskets. From the third lodge one man alone came on the run.

Although naturally a warlike people their belligerent bearing was heightened by the coarse hairs of some animal being braided into the scalp-locks. These hairs were painted red and served to hold the scalp-locks erect like the crest of a helmet. Except for the scalp-lock the head was shaven and painted.. Their bodies, bare to the waist, were also painted. The first man to reach the travelers had the print of a hand on his breast and shoulder, made with white clay.

"Onontio's two sons dreamed they would find a camp of the Red Earth People and a warrior's lodge. They have traveled far to find it," said Carcajou.

He was much relieved to behold their belligerent attitude vanish as they discovered they were in no danger of being attacked. The men with the white hands on his body replied:

"A young man had dreamed he killed a Sioux. He has put up a lodge. In it is his war tobacco and blue wampum painted red. There is a red cloth hanging in the lodge. The Sioux have killed our people four times. Their chiefs have not come to us to cover the dead. It is time their women howled for their dead.

"Onontio's children have guns. Their dream was very strong medicine to lead them here. Will they go to the lodge and draw the red cloth through their hands?"

"Our guns shoot straight and far. We will handle the red cloth," said Carcajou.

The Fox† hunters vied with each other in professing friendship. They patted Carcajou and La Blanche on the back and shoulders. Several who had met La Blanche

†The first of this tribe to meet white men gave the name of their clan, that of the Fox, when asked who they were. Thereafter they were called "Foxes."

and knew him talked with him. As they walked to the camp the young man who was organizing the war party turned back into the isolated lodge.

La Blanche rapidly informed his companion:

"The man with the white hands on his body is Sharp Ears, of the Fox clan. The young man who is enlisting men for the path against the Sioux is He Stands to Speak. He is of the Big Lynx clan. They have heard nothing of the plan to kill our people. They do not even know that the tribes are planning a big war against the Sioux."

"That is good. We will fool them," said Carcajou.

The men halted before two kettles cooking between the two lodges. Robes were spread for the new recruits and platters of clean bark given them. The organizer of the war party did not join them. The meat was rapidly eaten, and the Fox men were in high spirits because of the strength the two guns would give them. As soon as the kettles were emptied all hastened to the warrior's lodge, where Sharp Ears informed He Stands to Speak:

"Here come two stout men with guns. Their medicine is strong. They have had dreams. They will go with us and kill the Sioux."

The young partizan held no rank and had been an obscure member of the winter hunting party until he dreamed of killing a Sioux. But he was as free to organize a war party as a chief if he could secure followers. Exalted by his sudden leadership, he stood in the middle of the lodge and repeated his dream; then he turned his fierce gaze on the Frenchmen and dramatically pointed to the strip of red cloth.

The Frenchmen remained silent and motionless for a minute; then Carcajou screamed like a lynx and drew the cloth through his hands. Papa La Blanche did likewise, and the young leader began singing the *She-Go-Dem*, or war song, holding his medicine bag before him as he sang. Over and over he sang:

" 'We are going to war. We must be brave. The Great Medicine will help us.' "

"Hu! Hu! Hu!" shouted the others; and, joined by the Frenchmen, they began dancing around the singer, endorsing his song with exclamatory cries at regular intervals.

After the singing the leader removed a blanket from a cooked kettle at the back of the lodge, and although the hunters had just eaten a large amount of meat they fell upon it as if starved. There was now the most amiable feeling between the warriors and the white men. First one Fox man, then another, would select a titbit from the kettle and give it to Carcajou or La Blanche. The young leader told Papa La Blanche—

"You have danced the *She-Go-Dem* before."

"I have danced it many times. I have killed many Sioux," simply replied the old man.

"Hu! Hu! Hu!" howled the warriors.

"The mouth of your medicine bag must have been open. Everything is good so far," said Carcajou in French.

"We must not be with them when runners come from the Fox River to tell them what the tribes plan to do," warned La Blanche.

"A Wolverene doesn't walk into a trap, Old Nonsense. We'll get ahead of them once we reach the bottom of the bay."

The leader, puffed with ambition and impatient to travel, urged an immediate departure. He named the man who was to carry the kettle and act as cook. On a warpath this office was not to be avoided or to be considered menial; for the cook divided the rations and was entitled to keep the choicest morsel for himself. Nor was it his duty to bring water, collect firewood or shoot game. The position was something of a sinecure, and the Big Lynx man showed his astuteness in naming Sharp Ears.

Only one thing irritated Carcajou: None could eat again except at night, and a wolverene requires much meat. But to fast during the sun hours was part of the war medicine. Nor could any of the band, having passed the cloth through their hands, enjoy the company of women until the path brought them back to their villages. This was a most distasteful custom in the estimation of Papa La Blanche.

However, each found consolation in remembering they must run away from the band before the latter learned of the conspiracy to massacre all Frenchmen before attacking the Sioux.

He Stands to Speak began talking in the voice of a chief and walking with a strut. La Blanche eyed him gloomily and remarked—

"All he thinks about is to find a new name at the bottom of a kettle.*"

"He is vain," muttered Carcajou. "I can not bear vain men. The lack of vanity is the one thing that will save me. I could go farther if I had more confidence. But better to walk a short distance without ambition than to run far and lose my soul."

He Stands to Speak harangued his followers at some length, exhorting them to remember that they must be brave. This was for rhetorical effect, as nearly all in the band had distinguished themselves on the warpath. The leader concluded his oratory with orders to break camp at once, and with the reminder that they must hasten to their village on the Fox and smoke meat before entering the Sioux country.

The lodge was deserted and the work of embarking commenced. Although it was a simple matter to break camp, much time was lost as man after man withdrew for a time to invoke his medicine to permit him to be first in killing an enemy, thereby winning the right to march at the head of the band on returning home and entering the village. As organizer of the party He Stands to Speak must bring up the rear on the homeward trip and while entering the village and these secret petitions for favors he could not share in interested him but little. He was eager to be paddling to the Fox at the bottom of the bay.

It was found that the canoes needed overhauling and three needed new pitch on their seams. While this work was being done two men carrying a birch dropped it and split the bark from end to end. This was considered an ill omen by all. It would take some time to repair the damage. The leader's face grew gloomy. He started off into the growth to erect a new lodge and renew his medicine.

"The fool forgot to sing his death song while we were breaking camp," muttered Papa La Blanche. "I wouldn't travel with this band even if all the tribes loved the French."

"The path starts bad," agreed Carcajou, frowning at the broken canoe. "No girl in his village will see he is wearing vermilion† if this bad luck keeps up."

Sharp Ears joined them and said:

"He Stands to Speak will mend his medicine. He will come back very strong."

"A broken birch is nothing if it ends there," ominously replied Carcajou. "Onontio's sons will go into the woods and put up a small lodge and make a new medicine to keep the evil spirits away from the Red Earth people. If some strong medicine doesn't help us our troubles will spread like a spot of raccoon grease on a new blanket. The drop of grease is very small at first; then it slowly spreads and covers the whole blanket."

"There is a bad medicine working here," admitted Sharp Ears. "Onontio's sons have not been followed by ghosts?"

"Our medicine has been strong," promptly Carcajou assured him, quick to fear an inclination to blame him and La Blanche for any ill omens.

"Let the white men make their medicine very strong. If we find who has the bad medicine we will give him to our women to pound to death as we do with the Ninneways (Illinois)."

"If a leader's medicine is weak you can bring back no Sioux flesh* to your village," boldly warned Carcajou. To La Blanche he said, "That broken canoe may make it hard for us to live, let alone reaching the Fox portage."

La Blanche wheeled on Sharp Ears and accused:

"Some man here has killed a snake instead of giving him tobacco. Onontio's sons will make a strong medicine."

They walked into the woods but did not dare take their guns for fear of arousing the suspicion that they were planning flight. Armed only with their belt weapons, they followed a game trail leading south and skirting the shore. When some distance from the camp and satisfied that they were not being followed La Blanche complained:

"That foolish young man who thinks to find a new name in a kettle will blame us for their bad luck." He halted, turned, opened his medicine bag and pointed it in the direction he believed the young partizan to be. Then to Carcajou—

"We are running away?"

"We must get through to Perrot. Even now he is wishing the mighty Carcajou was at his side. If Durantaye was waiting for me to help I might let him stew in his own kettle before I would risk my skin."

*Win a new name after the victory feast celebrating their return home.

†Both sexes painted with vermilion to show they were thinking of marriage.

*It was anciently the custom of the Sauk and Fox to bring flesh of the enemy home to eat at the victory feast. Other tribes had this custom.

La Blanche sighed and replied:

"No guns. No food. We will have to eat each other, my little one."

AS THEY were completing a mile of the old trail Carcajou without a word suddenly treed himself. Moving like his shadow, La Blanche did likewise. Apparently there was nothing to disturb them. The foliage of the hardwoods, scarcely more than in the bud, permitted a wider view than could be enjoyed a month later. Carcajou whispered to his companion:

"Something comes running close to the shore. Ducks flew up."

In a few minutes the correctness of his woodcraft was proven by the appearance of two runners, stripped to leggings and moccasins and carrying no weapons except a knife and ax. Carcajou's dark brows drew down in an ugly scowl. He warned his companion:

"If they come to find Fox hunters and tell them of the war on the French they must not get through. Keep back while I open a talk."

He slipped from his tree and advanced along the path. The Indians discovered him and slowed to a walk. Carcajou halted, so that the meeting would be near La Blanche, and lifted his empty hand in the sign of peace. The runners came to a standstill a few feet from the Canadian and presented open palms, but neither put back in the belt the ax carried in the hand.

"The eyes are glad to see one of Onontio's sons," greeted one.

"It is good to meet the children of the Red Earth People," he gravely replied. "Now the sun shines warm through the clouds again. They bring a talk to some one. Has anything bad happened in their villages on the Fox?"

"Something good has come to their villages," slowly replied the first speaker.

And while they had halted one behind the other now they were standing side by side.

Carcajou hooked his thumbs in his belt and eagerly asked—

"Has Onontio's great son, Perrot, come to the Fox to eat meat with his children?"

"Perrot is not on the Fox."

And the two moved apart.

"There is a talk that he is coming to the Fox to ask the Red Earth People to go with him against the Iroquois. They say he brings many Miamis. At Mackinac the Ottawas and Hurons are making war songs and will go with him. The Great Onontio across the Big Water will give many presents to all his red children who carry a club against the Iroquois."

"The Miamis sent back Perrot's pipe. An owl told one of our old men that the Ottawas and Hurons will send white wampum to the Iroquois; that the Tionontati chief, the Rat, will carry it."

"The owl was a ghost and speaks a lie," harshly denounced Carcajou.

And as he spoke he stared at the powerful chest of the runner, rising and falling regularly.

He saw this motion cease and knew the man was holding his breath. He dropped on his knees as the ax flew at his head. Almost at the same time the second runner flung back his arm, but a circle of steel crashed into the side of the shaved head just as Carcajou hurled himself forward.

The Wolverene clutched his would-be murderer and found the greased body difficult to hold. Each gripped the knife hand of the other. Carcajou heard the soft patter of La Blanche's moccasins. The struggling runner heard it and opened his mouth to sound a yell. Although gripped by the forearm Carcajou thrust his wrist forward to strike the red throat and smother the outcry. Quick as a snake the runner hugged in his chin and sank his teeth into Carcajou's wrist.

"*Bête férocel*" snarled Carcajou.

And, wrenching his arm away, he drove it under the man's chin and worked his knee under the man's shoulders. Then with a sudden, downward pressure he snapped the man's neck.

Jumping to his feet, he beheld La Blanche cleaning his ax on some dead leaves. Speaking rapidly, he directed:

"Help me get these men back into the woods. See there is no blood on you. Then we must smooth out this path."

"Such a cast of the ax! Never did I do better!" rejoiced La Blanche. "He died on his feet as he was about to kill my little one."

"It was well thrown," conceded Carcajou. "But it would have been better if the edge hadn't hit him. The blood is bad."

"Now you are the foolish one. Our friends behind will travel by canoe. They will never know."

"Still it is very bad, old Papa," moodily

persisted Carcajou. "For now we must go back to the camp. If we keep on they will hunt for us and find these men. We don't want to face two dead men. What will happen to Perrot when they hurry messengers ahead to tell the Fox villages that the French have killed two of their runners?"

"*Sacrés cochons!*" growled Papa La Blanche. "And if we travel with them we'll be in two kettles once we reach a Fox village."

"That's among the tomorrows. This is today. We will slip away from them after making the mouth of the Fox. Now to hide these fellows."

The two runners were carried back from the path and covered with dead leaves. Then came the difficult task of covering up the signs of the combat. Where the two men had struggled in the path required more care than the hiding of the blood caused by the ax. There were furrows where the feet had dug into the forest floor. Masses of leaves had been upturned, presenting wet surfaces. To conceal all this required time and cunning. At last Carcajou rose and decided:

"It is the best we can do. We must be going back or they will come to find us."

"That wrist is more dangerous than a bloody trail here in the woods," warned La Blanche. "You must be careful of that wrist, my Carcajou. You must not forget and stretch out your arm. Pull the shirt sleeve down snugly."

"It is bad," admitted Carcajou, gazing at the tooth marks where the runner's jaws had clamped on the bronzed flesh.

He pulled down his shirt sleeve and hopefully continued:

"But they will be impatient to start. I will steer in my canoe, and it will be dark when we run away from them. But if these dead men are found it will go bad with Perrot."

They left the path and ran through the growth to the camp. The men, with the exception of He Stands to Speak, were still working on the canoes. The young leader was not to be seen and presumably was still making a new medicine in the forest.

Sharp Ears greeted the Frenchmen by saying:

"It has taken our brothers a long time to make their medicine strong. Did they find it weak?"

"It is never weak. It was angry because some Red Earth man forgot to give tobacco to a snake. We smoked tobacco and promised it Sioux scalps, and now it is stronger than ever. The Red Earth People will take many scalps. It will be hard to say who killed the first Sioux, so many will be killed almost at the same time. This shows we shall ambush the Sioux and cut off their heads before they know they are in danger. He Stands to Speak works long with his medicine. We believed we would find him here."

The man of the Fox clan made no reply and turned back to his work. Carcajou picked up his rifle with his left hand. La Blanche felt more at ease after he had tucked his musket under his arm. To the bush loper he whispered:

"If they work much longer, or if the young man doesn't come soon, it will be dark. Then they will wait to eat before taking to water."

"Some little owl is trying to tell me bad news," mumbled Carcajou. "That young man is gone too long. At the best he is having trouble with his medicine and will blame us."

One of the men working on the broken canoe called on Carcajou, who was nearest, to help. Papa La Blanche restrained his friend, whispered, "Remember the wrist" and gave a hand. Carcajou explained:

"There was a dream in the head of Onontio's son. He dreamed he did not use his right hand for work until he had killed a Sioux."

This explanation was entirely logical to the red mind; for the whims of one's medicine were endless. Yet the incident caused Carcajou to worry. If Papa La Blanche had not been on his guard the bush loper would have bared his wrist in helping to shift the position of the birch.

"*Ma foi!*" muttered Carcajou, wiping the nervous sweat from his face with his left arm. "See here, head of wood. You must think of that wrist all the time. If you let it slip from your mind for a second you'll be in lots of trouble."

AT LAST the birches were ready for the water, and still the leader did not come. The older men wrapped their greasy winter robes about them, huddled over tiny fires and stoically waited. The sun was now close to the western forest

roof. La Blanche's prediction was fulfilled when a man said—

"We will eat again before taking to water."

This was pleasing to all as they could not eat between sunrise and sunset without inviting disaster. Then again a warpath was never a matter of hurry except when the Iroquois made long journeys to strike unexpectedly. In intertribal wars on the Upper Lakes and the heads of the Mississippi waging war was a deliberate undertaking. Halts were made to hunt and dry meat. Much of the latter was hidden in caches along the route the attacking force would follow in retreating to their villages. Time was of not much consequence, and many days might be used up in hiding near a village on the chance of catching an enemy alone.

Carcajou was always ready to eat. As he bustled about, giving orders to Papa La Blanche, he found an opportunity to say:

"We'll run away after dark, Old Nonsense. We'll get out of this trap. The runners were bringing word for this band to hurry. Others may come any time. One more chance at a kettle of hot meat and we'll leave these rascals. Now what are they doing?"

"*Chantres de la Nuit*," mumbled Papa La Blanche, his eyes kindling as he beheld the three "night birds," their naked bodies blackened with charcoal, marching around the kettle and waving their bows and arrows.

Several other men, also naked except for girdles of otter skins from which hung the stuffed skins of crows, danced into the firelight as one of the night birds commenced to sing. When the song was finished and the man had given his war-dance all shouted in deep, guttural tones:

"Hu! Hu!"

The second singer danced and sang, and the chorus of approval again carried far into the forest. In the same manner was the third man applauded. Then the night birds and the men with otter-skin girdles joined in a dance of ferocious pantomime, each picturing what he would do to the Sioux. Once a runner from the Fox River reached them with a talk their violent gestures with knives and axes would include the French in their savage plans.

At the end of the dance the men began throwing hot coals on each other, some even filling gourds. After this fierce play they circled about in the dance again, and they would repeatedly pretend to strike a spectator. And although he knew this was a legitimate part of the pantomime Carcajou was so affected by the glowing eyes of one night bird that when the fellow suddenly thrust a knife in his face the Wolverene instinctively threw up his right hand and thrust the arm back. And in doing this he revealed the wounded and swollen wrist.

The dancer ceased his prancing, and he shouted—

"This man has been bitten!"

And he gaped in amazement at the peculiar wound.

Instantly the circle was quiet, and as dry fuel was thrown on the fire and the light became bright all eyes were turned on Carcajou.

"Into the kettles with both of us," murmured Papa La Blanche, allowing his robe to drop from his shoulders so as to leave his arms free.

"Something has buried its teeth in the arm of Onontio's son?" at last asked Sharp Ears.

Before Carcajou could answer another man cried—

"His arm was whole when we tried to take to water."

Sharp Eyes of the Fox clan reached forward, stripped back the wide sleeve of the hunting shirt and stared at the semicircle of tooth marks. Then he lifted his eyes and without speaking asked the bush loper to explain.

Carcajou shook down his sleeve and quietly said:

"It is nothing. Onontio's son knocked a wildcat from a tree with his ax to be used in making medicine against the Sioux."

"It is bad to be bitten by a medicine," tersely remarked Sharp Ears.

"It does not look like the tooth holes of a wildcat," said another.

"The medicine is very strong. It will help the Red Earth People. The wildcat is the Sioux. The cat is dead. Before the snow comes many Sioux will be dead," said Carcajou.

But as he talked he was flogging his keen wits to find some plausible explanation to allay the suspicions of Sharp Ears.

Papa La Blanche was dazed by the unexpected menace. His mind was frozen. While he was trying to rally to the support

of his companion Sharp Ears announced—

"This is something to be talked about before we take to water."

Papa La Blanche held his old head high, brushed back his yellowish-white scalp-lock and declared:

"It was a medicine cat. In it was the ghost of a dead Sioux. It could make its head look like that of a Sioux. That is why it was killed."

While the others firmly believed in ghosts this belated explanation was received in grim silence. Each pair of eyes was staring at the maimed wrist, and Carcajou imagined that the steady scrutiny made the wound smart and ache. Sharp Ears repeated—

"It is something to be talked about before we leave this camp."

As he spoke a weird cry from the forest brought them all to their feet, their eyes glowing like those of a lynx.

"This is a medicine place. We must go away," muttered La Blanche, his hand trembling as it brushed back his scalp-lock.

The cry sounded again. Sharp Ears exclaimed—

"Some one cries for the dead!"

The mournful message was repeated the third time, now sounding nearer. Only one member of the band was absent, the young man whose dream had promoted him to leadership.

"Onontio's son says he killed a wildcat," muttered Sharp Ears. "Our leader is of the Big Lynx clan."

"That is the Big Lynx man crying for the dead," spoke up Papa La Blanche. "His own brothers should know his voice. He has found something."

"He has found a dead man! We must go to meet him!" exclaimed one of the Nightbirds.

"We will all go," said Sharp Ears, his gaze resting on the two Frenchmen.

Whooping loudly, Carcajou started for the forest with Papa La Blanche at his heels. The Indians streamed after them, yelping and brandishing their weapons. As soon as he had penetrated some distance into the growth Carcajou ceased his outcries and came to a halt. The cry for the dead was repeated at regular intervals, each time sounding a bit nearer, and was answered by loud shouts as the Fox men noisily pressed on to meet their leader.

Carcajou began a stealthy withdrawal to the camp.

"This is bad business," he whispered to La Blanche as they circled outside the firelight to gain the shore and canoes.

Behind them wild screams of rage tore through the forest, and they knew He Stands to Speak had met his followers. The Frenchmen realized that the next few minutes must decide whether they were to live or die. Carcajou placed a canoe ready for launching and commanded:

"Smash all the birches, old Papa. Then bring the kettle."

The two began using their axes and in thirty seconds had spoiled all the canoes but one. La Blanche darted to the fire to secure the kettle while Carcajou picked up their packs and blankets. La Blanche reached the canoe first and held it ready to push off. Loaded with their belongings, Carcajou was almost within reach of the birch when something leaped upon his back. The instant he felt the heavy body crash against him the bush loper went down on his knees; and, catapulted by his own momentum, the savage continued his flight and gave a strangled cry as he struck the ground. Instantly the Wolverene was upon him, but the man remained strangely limp and quiet. With his ax raised to spoil any trick Carcajou swiftly investigated with his free hand.

Then he was on his feet, placing packs and blankets and weapons in the canoe and crying:

"Into the birch! I'll push off! Here they come!"

Nimble from fear, La Blanche took his place just as the Fox band came running to the fire. As the canoe shot from the shore and into the darkness Papa La Blanche marveled:

"How could my Carcajou kill a man so quick? I did not have time to open my medicine bag."

"Father Marquette helped us," whispered Carcajou.

For the French always called on the dead priest, who died on the River of the Black Robe*, when threatened by any danger on Lake Michigan. He added:

"The man killed himself. When he flew off my back he fell on his own knife. *Ma foi!* But it will make their eyes stick out when they find him! Ah! Now they've come upon him."

*Père Marquette River, Mason County, Michigan.

Terrible screams pursued them as the Fox hunters stumbled over the dead man and discovered their ruined canoes.

"They sound like wolves," muttered La Blanche as he quickened his stroke.

"The dead man was Sharp Ears. He was suspicious. He stayed behind to see if we came back. Or else he trailed us as soft-footed as a *loup-cervier*."

"He found it bad medicine," snarled La Blanche. "*Sacris cochons!* Howl your heads off!"

"That young man will step aside as leader," chuckled Carcajou. "It would be better for him if he had kept to making new medicine instead of prowling around until he found those two dead runners we hid down the path. Their children's children will talk about the bold Carcajou. Come now, Old Nonsense, let's give them a cry."

And, throwing back his head, he screamed so loudly that for a bit the hunters kept silent as if expecting him to return and attack them.

Papa La Blanche shouted derisively in the tongue of their enemies, the Sioux, and followed it up with war whoops of the many tribes he had lived with.

"That will do for howling, Old Trouble-Hunter," ordered Carcajou. "Put your wind into your arms. Hate will give them wings. We're not out of the kettle yet."

"We can turn back north and be safe," muttered Papa La Blanche.

"If you were not so old that you must soon die I would throw you overboard. You forget my dear friend needs my help. What kind of a man are you to run away because you fear you may be cooked? Even now Perrot is staring his eyes out and praying the Saints to send Carcajou to help him."

CHAPTER V

AT PERROT'S CAMP

PAPA LA BLANCHE wished to reduce risks by landing at a small stream three miles west of the Fox. The latter was a dangerous thoroughfare as along its banks ran the main Indian path and on its waters canoes were often passing. But Carcajou was in a reckless mood, tinged with viciousness. His worries, more than the thirty miles of paddling, had brought about this state of mind. With a flurry of abuse he held on to the mouth of the Fox and concealed the canoe.

"Now we run to meet trouble," sighed the old man.

"You seem to forget, old Papa Afraid, that we came down here to keep my friend's hair on his head. If we had wanted an open path we could have traveled north to Mackinac."

"You'll kill me and yourself," surrendered La Blanche. "And to the old the last few years are the most precious."

"What talk! You have less to lose than I."

"It is all I have," snarled Papa.

"Good. We both risk all we have. Perrot risks all he has. We all take the one chance for the sake of New France, for Old France and Louis the Great. And may Father Marquette and all the holy Saints help us."

"We are not on the lake. Father Marquette can not help us," mumbled La Blanche; and he swung his medicine bag before him and fumbled with the puckering strings to open the mouth of the bag.

"Silence, blasphemous one!" roared Carcajou, forgetting the need of cunning woodcraft. "You have not been to Mass or confession for many years. Your sins and wives weigh you down. I am good for another year. All —— can't drive me from this river. If I am hit on the head my ghost will finish the journey."

"If I get out of this I will hunt up Father Allouez and will send many candles to the mission of St. François Xavier," mumbled La Blanche.

"Old rascal, it will take all the Black Robes in North America to absolve you. You can best reduce the measure by trying to reach Perrot. Every mile is so much penance."

"Carrying help to dead men," grumbled La Blanche. Carcajou ignored him. "Soon they will be throwing soup over their shoulders to feed our ghosts." Carcajou increased his pace, and his companion became silent to save his breath.

Two miles up the river the old man halted and insisted—

"I must sleep even if I lose my scalp-lock."

It was within an hour of midday, and even Carcajou felt weary. He too halted and sniffed the air.

"Very soon we will see smoke," he announced. "Where is your nose? Asleep? We must draw back from this path."

La Blanche shook off his weariness and followed the bush loper into the growth. Some distance from the path Carcajou shifted his course to travel parallel to the river and came to where the timber thinned out on his left, or river side. Now they could see a wisp of smoke curling up from a fire in a small opening.

"There is a kettle cooking!" eagerly whispered La Blanche.

A man walked into the opening and stood on the river bank.

"A white man! A Frenchman!" cried Carcajou.

And he started for the fire. La Blanche trotted at his heels, insisting that they were walking into a trap and yet keen to reach the kettle. Carcajou halted long enough to relieve his friend of his pack and slowed to a leisurely walk as he left the timber and approached the camp. Two Frenchmen came from the south side of the clearing, packing big bundles of dry fagots.

One of these dropped his burden and after a sharp glance at the newcomers exclaimed:

"The Wolverene! He still lives!"

"*Bon jour, m'sieurs,*" politely hailed Carcajou.

The man on the river bank wheeled about and approached, and Carcajou had eyes only for him.

"My eyes are two liars!" he mumbled as he stared.

Then he grinned broadly and felt a great joy. He was gazing on Nicolas Perrot, the man he believed was being besieged at his post on the Mississippi, if not already slain. There was no longer need for him to cover the Fox-Wisconsin portage and all its many dangers. Within three miles of the lake he had found his man, Perrot, one of the greatest, if not the first of all *coureurs de bois*.

At this time Perrot was forty-three years old. He had come to New France when young and almost immediately had been precipitated into the life of the unknown West. First as an *engagé* employed by the Jesuit missionaries he had visited and studied the language, customs and habits of many tribes of the Upper Lakes and at the head waters of the Mississippi. Four years had been used in familiarizing himself with the red life. Then he became a *coureur de bois*, but was distinguished from all others because of his breadth of vision.

Trading for profits satisfied but a portion of his ambitions. Almost from the first he had been impressed with the vital importance of uniting all these far tribes in opposition to the power of the Iroquois. He believed it to be a waste of time and opportunity for New France to seek a permanent peace with the inmates of the Long House.

He continually insisted that the Iroquois, common enemy to New France and the Western nations, must be reduced in power until they could no longer control the channels of the fur trade. Different tribes had extended to him the honors and prerogatives of the calumet. He ranked as chief among them, and on this fair spring morning, as the unruly Carcajou gaped at his ideal of forest men, there was no man in the West who had as great influence in red councils.

He had proven himself worthy of his wide confidence by service. He had saved the Potawatomi from the vengeance of the Menominee when the warriors of the former had left their villages unprotected by journeying to Montreal. And the Potawatomi had hailed him as a god. Other inter-tribal feuds he had smoothed out. Wayward as children in their hates, he was continually busying himself in patch-up troubles, inducing tribes to exchange peace tobacco; and before perhaps even he himself realized it he was the middleman between the Indians' trade with New France. If old Louis' fatuous plans for driving all the English from North America and making the continent French from Hudson Bay to the Gulf, and from ocean to ocean, ever contained any merit it was due to the astuteness and loyalty of men such as Perrot.

He was constantly surrounded by red intrigue, often the most subtle. The tribes he had befriended at times suspected his motives or forgot favors. Today's work must be done over again tomorrow. Those who hailed him as the greatest of all of Onontio's children became jealous when he established friendly relations with the Sioux. He was the first of the French to visit the Fox people after the fear of the Iroquois drove them to the Upper Fox and Wolf Rivers. After La Barre's burlesque attempt in 1684 to tame the Iroquois Nicolas Perrot was the one Frenchman who could

return to the Upper Lakes with the enraged tribes and live to tell his experiences. None but he had been able to induce them to make the traverse to the Niagara Portage, only to be ignominiously sent home with the hate of the victorious Iroquois their only profit. Throughout that eastern advance of his "Army of the South" he had stood continually on the edge of death, berating proud chiefs, taunting them with cowardice, exploding plots to turn against him; one indomitable figure in the midst of primitive passions, and always the master. Yet he was safe with them, although Onontio and the Great Onontio lost prestige.

With his fortunes in a sorry state, with his creditors at Cap de la Madeleine and Montreal pressing for payments, he endeavored to avoid financial ruin by establishing his post on the Mississippi. Along with his trading ventures he had held the office of governor-general over the Upper Lakes and heads of the Mississippi until Durantaye superseded him in authority. And although he was destined to poverty at the close of his magnificent efforts to promote the interests of the colony, as were Durantaye, Joliet and others, none were more unselfishly steadfast in loyalty to France and the Louis who so often forgot.

The man appealed to Carcajou from the first because of his understanding of the red man. As he came to know him better Carcajou also deeply admired the trait of caution that was usually concealed by the appearance of brusk rashness.

Carcajou approved of his distrust of the tribes. He agreed with Perrot's belief that the Hurons were the most crafty and treacherous of Upper Lakes Indians. He commended Perrot's suspicions as to the Illinois and his distrust of the Chippewas. Adored by some tribes, a deity to others and free to visit and trade where no other white man might, he never failed to detect that instability which could emanate from causes the average European would ignore as being too trivial to grow into a menace. So for years he had balanced life against death, always conscious of his danger but never avoiding it.

AS PERROT hurried forward to meet Carcajou, his face, beaten and burned by wind and weather, lighted with interest. Bowing low, Carcajou announced—

"I have come, M'sieur Perrot, to help you."

"You villain!" replied Perrot, yet smiling. "If you had not found me you would have walked into a kettle. What are you planning to do now? And there's old La Blanche behind you. Everywhere I go I find that rascal's 'widows.' "

"M'sieur is kind to remember us," affably said Carcajou. "But we must have a talk. I risked a cage on Cape Diamond to come down here and talk with m'sieur."

"The shadow of the cage was on you when you went with me to Niagara three years ago. We will talk now. You bring news?"

"I am just from Quebec. I opened some of my talk to M'sieur Durantaye at Mackinac. He said I would be killed if I kept on to the bay. But Death and I are old acquaintances. He plays a bit rough with me at times, but not to hurt. Old Papa Nonsense here expected to find m'sieur in great trouble. Behold! He walks about as free as if picking berries. The Menominee at their river told us the tribes were to rob m'sieur's post on the Mississippi and then kill him and all Frenchmen. The rascals! Some runner got through with word Carcajou was coming to kick that kettle of fat into the fire."

"Sit down by the fire. Pierre, lift off the kettle. We'll eat. I had a little trouble at the fort, but having my four men change their dress repeatedly I presented a force of forty men. The trouble was smoothed out, and I traded with the men who came to cut off my head. That's all past. Now for your talk. Are the tribes gathering at Mackinac and Detroit to carry a club against the Iroquois?"

They were seated at the fire, and Perrot, noticing the hungry eyes fixed on the kettle, motioned for the two to begin eating. Between mouthfuls Carcajou told of the Huron belt that was to be sent to the Iroquois and of his belief that the Rat was back of the peace plan as well as the prime mover in the conspiracy to loot the Mississippi post and massacre the French.

"The Rat believes we French are anxious to make a lasting peace with the Iroquois," said Perrot. "It is natural after the blunders we have made. They are little children at times. Then again they are very wise old men. Two nations will fight each other for years, exterminating each other, with the original trouble being

nothing more important than the ownership of a grasshopper. And there's no denying English rum is stronger than our brandy and that English prices are higher than ours."

"M'sieur's head is full of wisdom," mumbled Carcajou, as he tore mouthfuls from a two-pound piece of meat. "But here is something very important."

And he told of the coming of Rooseboom and McGregorie and of the red conspiracy to kill all the French on the lakes after receiving the English goods and rum.

"That is very serious," murmured Perrot, idly picking up bits of wood and tossing them into the fire. "But it's all right now that Monsieur Durantaye has been warned. You deserve all the praise Monsieur Durantaye gave you for bringing that information."

"Praise?" bitterly cried Carcajou. "When I left Mackinac to find you, m'sieur, the honorable captain-general was hunting for me so he could tie me up like a tame bear."

"What's this?" demanded Perrot, his brows coming down. "The commandant does not give thanks in any such sorry fashion. See here, Carcajou, have you been serving the devil again?"

"What I did was done for New France," eagerly defended Carcajou. "Be so good as to hear me, m'sieur, while I talk on belts."

And he rapidly related the death of the Tionontati man and the order on Du Lhut's fort to cover the victim.

Perrot turned the situation over in his mind; then decided:

"Of course property must be respected or there could be no beaver trade out here. Yet a man will do almost anything to save his life; and you were in some danger. And the man at the post did not have to honor your order. But it is well he did. It would have been better had you gone with the Rat to the post and explained to Monsieur Du Lhut. Then the Rat would understand that the bones were covered by one in authority, and not by a bush loper. For that's what you are, Carcajou."

"Was, perhaps," interposed Carcajou. "Since then I have been to Quebec and to confession and have done no free trading. One with a simple mind gets confused, m'sieur, as to who has a right to trade out here. Sieur La Salle forbade licensed traders to visit the Illinois country where he built his post, and monseigneur, the intendant, complained to the Throne."

"We will not talk about that," sternly broke in Perrot. "It sounds as if you were criticizing your betters. As to your order on Monsieur Du Lhut, taking all things into consideration, I know Monsieur Durantaye will approve when he gets the right of it. But why they call you the 'Wolverene' I don't understand. For where is your cunning?"

"Cunning? In what, m'sieur?" gasped Carcajou.

"A Tionontati man is killed at your camp on the Narrows by a new trade ax. You left that killing a mystery. The Rat believes a Frenchman did it. Why didn't you find the assassin?"

"But, m'sieur, it must have been some straggling Indian."

"No Indian would be wandering around alone near your camp on the Narrows. If there was one he would be friendly and visit your camp. If hostile to the Tionontati men he would never risk detection by waiting to waylay one of the Rat's men. And how was any such to know the Tionontati man would leave the camp in the night to search for the hidden brandy? If he saw the keg hidden he would steal it and make off. And why should an assassin leave a new ax? No; I wouldn't call you a 'wolverene' while you were at the Narrows."

"But, m'sieur, none in my camp killed the man unless it was one of the Tionontati. That couldn't be; brother doesn't kill brother. Even if the Rat wants to see the French killed he wouldn't kill one of his own men to turn his people against us. And if he did that he would never wipe out the death by accepting gifts."

"Well, well; I wasn't there. I don't know. If I'd been there I'd have dug up the truth. I have to see things through your eyes, and you saw nothing that clears up the mystery. The trade order was all right. It helped you out of trouble and must have pleased the Rat, or he wouldn't have accepted the goods."

"I knew you would approve," said Carcajou. "I told old Papa Foolish here that you would say Carcajou did right. What are trade goods when life or the welfare of New France is concerned? We think as one on it, m'sieur; and that brings me to another trifle. To reach the Oconto in traveling to save you, m'sieur, I had to pay Menominee

men. I had no goods. I drew a small order on M'sieur and told the Menominee men it would be honored."

"Drew an order on me?" sternly repeated Perrot. "What are you thinking of? Do you think you can wander around and draw orders on honest traders to pay your debts?"

"Had I not done so I would not have reached the Oconto in time to find the camp of Fox men returning from the winter hunt and preparing to take a path against the Sioux."

"*Mon Dieu!* This is something else. Where's your tongue? What about the Fox hunters?"

Carcajou explained volubly until Papa La Blanche coughed gently. Then he ceased. Perrot puzzled over the incomplete recital and said:

"But I see no reason why you should have to run away from them. That you were free to leave is shown by your arrival on the Fox."

"Pardon, m'sieur; but we smashed their canoes," Carcajou informed him.

Perrot stared in bewilderment. Then he frowned. He had noted the swift exchange of glances between the two. He quietly warned:

"Carcajou, give me a full talk, or I'll guarantee you will never fill the iron cage on Cape Diamond. I will turn you over to the first band of Fox men we meet and tell them to play with you as a bad son of France."

Carcajou realized that it would be unsafe to withhold any part of his adventures at the Oconto. As a preface to a full confession he bitterly remarked:

"One would be safer to go and live in a Seneca village. I refer, m'sieur, to the matter of the two Fox runners who came with a talk to the hunters, telling them of the plan to kill all Frenchmen, including M'sieur Perrot."

"But I have smoothed all that out. That is all ended."

"But we did not know. Nor did the runners know it was smoothed out. So when they attacked old Papa and me we killed them."

"A better cast of the ax I never made," cackled Papa La Blanche.

"*Bon Dieu!* More dead men for Nicolas Perrot to cover! If some one does not kill you, you will ruin New France."

"Not so, M'sieur Perrot," haughtily replied the bush loper. "Carcajou can cover his own dead. He whipped Dubeau because they said he was the strongest man in New France. As he did not kill the Tionontati man it was right that New France should cover him. Old Papa here helped me kill two men. Old Papa has nothing but his greasy winter robe and too many wives. If the Fox runners must be covered Carcajou will do it. Now as a Wolverene, even if m'sieur doubts his cunning, I would expect m'sieur to tell the Fox people:

"'Look here! What do you mean by sending two of your men to kill Onontio's good sons? I came to you and helped you when you were running away from the Iroquois kettles. Do you want me to come again and bring Iroquois axes against you? It will take a big pile of beaver, as tall as the two sons your men tried to kill, to wipe out this trouble.'

"*Ma foi!* I'd say that if I were M'sieur Perrot, and then laugh to see those Foxes running to hide in their holes."

Perrot's stern features relaxed, and tiny wrinkles showed at the corners of his eyes as he listened. He said:

"I think you are more cunning now than you were at the Narrows. Only I shall not wait for the Fox villages to make complaints. I will send a talk to them, asking what they mean by sending men to kill my runners. That will put them on the defensive. But remember this, Carcajou; I know much that is against you. None of your wolverene tricks here."

"M'sieur shall hear nothing but praise. And I was forgetting the old Iroquois woman. Black Kettle told me about her at the River of Sables. She has been saving dry bark ever since eighty-four, when La Barre showed himself to be more foolish than old Papa Nonsense here."

Perrot lifted his brows and murmured—"Well, what of it?"

"She saves the dry bark to use in burning you, m'sieur. Her son was killed by one of your Hurons when you took the tribes to Niagara and then had to tell them they'd made the long traverse on a fool's errand. It would be laughable if m'sieur's presence did not make laughter impolite. Yes; I have laughed, even as it is. M'sieur will smile at the foolishness of it. The old woman—she is a Seneca—saves bark to burn M'sieur Perrot, who only came to the

Niagara Portage and then returned to the Upper Lakes. Of course she should hope to burn La Barre, who planned the war and then crawled out of the fighting. Or burn the Huron man who scouted into the woods deep enough to kill the young man. Or burn the Farmer of the Beaver, who would have men branded and sent to the galleys because they take high English prices instead of poor Montreal prices. Or burn his most gracious Majesty——"

"Silence!" wrathfully broke in Perrot. "You can never be so far from the St. Lawrence as to speak lightly of his Majesty, or his Majesty's servants. The hand of Louis the Great reaches all over the world. There will be no crawling out of the next fight. Even you understand that."

"I shall go with m'sieur. I will have a fight after making that long traverse if I have to fight old Papa here. But——"

"But what?"

"No. I will not finish. I must be careful how I speak to the Governor of New France."

"Your honest opinion, honestly given to me, would not be disrespect," urged Perrot, now studying the brown face shrewdly.

"If I am protected by white wampum I will say this," said Carcajou. "We shall not whip the Iroquois. That rascal Dongan will see they have guns and much powder and may even send his soldiers to help them. We shall not have enough *habitants*, like your brave Carcajou. The soldiers from France are poor fighters in the forest. The Iroquois can build a lodge around them and not be seen. Our red allies will make a dash. Then one of them will have a bad dream, and they will all paddle home. Before we can get them to the Niagara they will be fearing that the Iroquois are behind them, burning their villages, killing their old men and carrying off their women and children."

"Do not let me hear of you whispering that to any man, red or white," harshly warned Perrot. "The Iroquois are troubled. They are set off in the East. They see the beaver-country being closed to them. They see too many tribes arrayed against them. Denonville is not La Barre."

"M'sieur is always correct. I never liked that La Barre. He was an enemy to poor Sieur La Salle. If m'sieur please, I am very sleepy. Old Nonsense here is already asleep. Do we travel, or wait here?"

"Sleep. I am waiting for two of my men to come down the river. We shall be here another day or two. I am expecting chiefs to come and smoke war tobacco with me against the Iroquois."

"It is the great Perrot they look to when warriors are needed on the Niagara," flattered Carcajou. "It is *habitants* m'sieur needs. A hundred such bold boys as Carcajou and old Papa Nonsense will make a bigger fight than a thousand Ottawas and Hurons. You will need us at your side in the Seneca country. We'll see that old Seneca woman never has a chance to use the dry bark she's been saving."

Perrot readily admitted:

"You'd be a good man to go along with me, Carcajou. I am not forgetting we were together three years ago."

"Ah, such a time that was! Only the Hurons would accept our tomahawk at first. And Du Lhut said only Nicolas Perrot could raise the tribes. You attended holy Mass and went to those who refused the tomahawk. You talked to them, and they picked it up.

"The Ottawas did not overtake us until we reached Saginaw. Du Lhut and Durantaye said they would not come. But they did—to follow Perrot. And they would go with us only on condition that you lead them. Then all the savages would have turned back when a French soldier happened to shoot himself. It was you who made them change their minds and believe it was not a bad sign."

"Yes, it was a hard fight to get them down to the Niagara," murmured Perrot, again living over his endless troubles in inducing the "Army of the South" to hold to the war path. "Some one would dream an Iroquois had stepped over his gun. Another, that the Iroquois had sent a band to steal women and children from their unprotected villages."

"And how the Ottawas would have turned back when, at the islands of the Detroit, one of their men fired at a herd of elk in the water and broke his brother's arm!"

"It was more serious at Long Point," mused Perrot, "when some of the bay tribes told the Ottawas they must go home, or their women would starve because they didn't know how to catch fish."

"And those long seven days when bad weather held us back! I surely believed fair weather would find only the *coureurs de bois* behind you," added Carcajou.

"Enough. No more dreaming. Look here; I can use you. I can protect you from all you've told me. Are you sure you have told me all? I want no surprizes."

Carcajou frowned as he rapidly reviewed his recent predicaments. Finally he announced:

"There is nothing else, m'sieur. All else is as stainless as the life of a little child. I do not mention the trifling matter of a jug of brandy I borrowed from M'sieur Durantaye at the fort. I could not wait to ask him for it as he was hunting for me to put me in irons. And I had promised old Papa Nonsense to pay back some brandy of his I had borrowed."

"Well, well! We'll add the brandy to the list. Now take your rest. I must do some thinking."

CARCAJOU obeyed by throwing himself down beside Papa La Blanche and immediately falling asleep. It was night when the two awoke. Perrot had retired to a bark shelter. The two Frenchmen were sleeping near the fire, over which bubbled a kettle. Without awakening Perrot Carcajou and his companion ate most of the meat and returned to their blankets. When they next opened their eyes the sun was above the forest, and the Frenchmen were accusing each other of eating the meat while the other slept.

"Come, come, my sons," said Carcajou. "Where is the great Perrot? And stop this squaw-quarreling over a bit of meat."

"M'sieur Perrot is down at the mouth of the river," sullenly replied one of the men. "He ate early and went to meet some chiefs. While I slept this man nearly finished the kettle."

"I did not. It was he," passionately cried the other. "My stomach sticks to my backbone I am so empty."

Carcajou gravely inspected the kettle and exclaimed:

"*Ma foi!* Whoever it was ate like two men. There is barely a taste for old Papa Nonsense, who is aged and feeble. Shame on you, belly-stuffers! Bring in some wood and get out another kettle so your master can have meat for the chiefs. After we have snatched a few mouthfuls we will shoot a deer for the pot."

While they were collecting more fuel Carcajou and Papa La Blanche finished the meat.

Carcajou took his rifle and went alone to find game. Within an hour they heard the crack of the rifle three times. When he returned he had the dressed carcass of a deer on his shoulder. He threw it down by the fires, where two kettles of water were boiling, and proceeded to cut it up. He told La Blanche—

"Take these children to bring in the rest of the meat."

Papa beckoned for the two men to follow him and trotted into the forest. That he had no trouble in finding Carcajou's trail was proven by his speedy return with each of the men carrying meat. While waiting for the meat to cook Carcajou expressed his intentions of seeking Perrot. One of the men told him—

"M'sieur Perrot left orders for you to stay here till he came back."

"Orders, rascal!" cried Carcajou. "Shall I bite you? He left a request. Be careful how you repeat a talk. We will wait here a bit, old Papa Simple."

La Blanche grunted contentedly, sought his blankets and was soon asleep.

"He is like a fat bear in winter," muttered Carcajou. "Soon he must sleep for all time, and now he would waste the sunshine."

The sound of voices down the river bank soon demanded his attention. He prodded La Blanche into wakefulness and proceeded to inspect the kettles.

"Bring large pieces of clean bark," he ordered. "M'sieur comes with our red friends. Hot meat is soothing. Papa, keep close to me."

Into the clearing walked Perrot. By his side stalked He Stands to Speak, of the Big Lynx clan. Although the day was warm he had his robe over his head. It was obvious that his high ambition to act as partizan against the Sioux had been discouraged by the tragedy on the Oconto and completely thwarted by Perrot's talk at the mouth of the river.

Carcajou and his friend watched the Fox hunters closely, but the latter did not appear to see them. The sheets of clean bark and the steaming kettles aroused a show of interest, however, As they seated themselves near the kettles and opposite the two men they had endeavored to slay Perrot stepped before them and said:

"Onontio, through your father, will cover the bones of the man who killed himself on

his own knife. You know your father has a straight tongue and will do as he talks. We have smoked on my talk. These children of Onontio have faced death many times to reach me and go with me to kill your enemies, the Iroquois. We will smoke again, and you will put all evil from your hearts."

That this peace, or armistice, between the Fox hunters and the two Frenchmen had been agreed to at the mouth of the river was evidenced by the promptness with which He Stands to Speak produced a pipe and filled it with peace tobacco. He puffed to the spirits of the air, earth and water and passed it on. All the Indians and white men smoked. Then Carcajou laid aside his gun and joined the group. La Blanche entered into an amiable conversation with the men. When he had an opportunity Carcajou inquired of Perrot:

"What about the two runners? You spoke of covering only the man of the Fox clan?"

"And a pretty price it will cost me," sighed Perrot. "Of course the two runners must be covered, although they came to stir up war against the French. That will cost quite a bit. But these men can not receive presents for them, or even agree to their being covered. I will cover them when their chiefs come down the river."

"If you get into any more trouble you must shift for yourself. I must keep some goods to trade. I have a wife and six children, yet have to live in the woods apart from them. If I am fortunate enough to turn a profit that profit is in the woods, and I must stay out here to watch it. The merchants in Montreal and Quebec have the blessings of their families; but their profits also are in the woods. They are indebted to France; I am indebted to them. When the beaver trade falls off for only a year both merchant and trader are fortunate if they have bread to eat."

"But you, m'sieur, such an honest trader; surely you have prospered," said Carcajou.

Perrot's eyes were very sober as he confided:

"My whole fortune, some forty thousand livres' worth of peltries, is three leagues up the river at the St. François Xavier mission. I gave a monstrance of silver to the mission last year. Now I must leave my peltry there instead of taking it to Montreal and satisfying some of my creditors."

"It will be safe," optimistically declared Carcajou. "Prices will be better next year. You will double your profit by waiting a season."

"The profit will need to double. The Indians will not disturb the mission, and my goods, or furs, would be perfectly safe from theft in any of their villages. But it's hard to go almost to Montreal and leave the furs back here.*

Carcajou scratched his head and thought deeply. Finally he said:

"M'sieur, I have no wife or children. It is right I should cover my own dead. Very soon, m'sieur, you shall receive enough in goods or peltry to cover the man of the Fox clan and the two runners and to make up for the order you will pay to the Menominee."

Perrot smiled ironically and remarked—

"I did not know you brought goods out on this trip."

"Not being in trade, I brought no goods," haughtily replied Carcajou. "It is true I do not know just how I shall get goods or peltry, but Father Marquette will help me."

"Be careful and not speak a sacrilege," sternly warned Perrot. "You are an outcast. You have nothing. I am content to do what I have done."

"Wait. You shall see," doggedly muttered Carcajou. "It shall not be said the Wolverene had to call on another to cover his dead."

La Blanche, overhearing part of the talk, called out—

"Don't forget the brandy you were to pay me."

Perrot showed his teeth in a smile of amusement. Carcajou, furious, startled the Indians by roaring:

"Silence, thou simple one! I will drag you back to that Mascouten woman and say:

" 'See what I found in my trap. His fur will never be prime; but here he is.'"

Then to Perrot he warmly continued:

"I tell you, m'sieur, I keep my word. I

*While Perrot was with Denonville in the Seneca country the church and adjoining buildings at the mission burned and the peltry was destroyed. The monstrance of elaborate workmanship and standing fifteen inches high, is now owned by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Green Bay and is deposited in the State Historical Museum at Madison, Wis. So far as is known this is the oldest relic of French occupancy in Wisconsin. Around the rim of the oval base an inscription in French reads: "This Monstrance was given by Mr. Nicolas Perrot to the Mission of St. François Xavier at the Bay of Puants, 1686." The mission was located a few miles from the mouth of the Fox River where De Père now stands.

said I would come here. I am here. The Rat tried to stop me at the Narrows. M'sieur Durantaye would have stopped me at Mackinac. The hunters would have stopped me at the Oconto. But I had promised myself. I am here."

"I know, I know," gently interrupted Perrot. "Forget about the goods. They do not worry me. You shall go with me to Niagara and win a pardon from New France. In that way you will repay everything. But we must not talk between ourselves any more. The Foxes do not understand. They will be suspicious, or think we are quarreling. So try to bring a smile on that ugly face."

Carcajou realized the danger of arousing any suspicions in the red guests and laughed loudly, although his eyes retained an angry glint whenever he glanced at Papa Blanche.

The meat was now dished out on platters of bark and was quickly consumed. After another smoke He Who Stands to Speak announced that the Fox men would travel up the river and meet their people and would return with them to follow Perrot to Mackinac and Niagara. The kinsmen of the dead runners would be informed that Onontio was ready to cover the bones and that the Frenchmen fought in self-defense. White and red parted friends. After the hunters had disappeared up the river path Perrot announced:

"They were burning with the hate that had brought them so quickly afoot from the Oconto when I met them at the mouth of the river. If their talk doesn't hurry the chiefs down the river I shall have to go without them. That would be bad, but I can wait here only a day or two longer."

"I will carry your talk to the chiefs and bring them down here on the run," offered Carcajou.

"Not until I've paid for those two dead runners," grimly replied Perrot.

Carcajou went hunting again to provide a big feast of meat for the Indians coming down the river. Papa La Blanche found a bow and arrows in the camp and shot ducks and geese in a river cove. But the day wore away without the leading men from the upper Fox and Wisconsin appearing.

Perrot was impatient to be on his way to Mackinac. At dusk he withdrew to the river bank to decide just what he should do if the tribes should not join him, although having accepted the ax. It was imperative that he reach Mackinac before Rooseboom and McGregorie arrived, but he must take red allies with him.

He dared not send Carcajou to hurry the chiefs to the rendezvous until the Fox runners had been covered with gifts. His own Frenchmen would be useless on such an errand. There was left Papa La Blanche. Papa was well acquainted in many tribes, but had weakened his influence by wholesale philandering. Yet as a bearer of a talk he could be employed, providing he did not find a new wife and forget his business.

Carcajou was restless because of inactivity. He wandered along the path toward the mouth of the river. Papa La Blanche, who had been examining his medicine bag, glided after him.

"Why are you trailing me instead of sleeping, Old Foolish?" softly inquired Carcajou.

"My medicine tells me a storm comes," murmured the old man.

"There is neither wind nor rain in the sky."

"There is a storm in bad hearts," replied La Blanche. "An owl tried to tell me something. I heard a loon howling like a wolf. Something bad will come to us soon."

"All our bad luck is ended. Your medicine is weak," scoffed Carcajou; and yet the old man's dubious prophecy made him feel uncomfortable. "We are under the protection of Father Marquette."

"Father Marquette has been moved from his grave on the River of the Black Robe to Mackinac. He can not know what trouble is coming to his children down here on the Fox."

"Imbecile! You speak a sacrilege," growled Carcajou.

"Softly, softly, my little one," muttered the old man. "Open your ears. Some one comes from the mouth of the river. I feel unlucky."

Carcajou caught it, the sound of some one running rapidly along the river path. He and La Blanche swiftly retreated and on reaching the opening did not enter it but circled through the growth and halted under cover near the fire. As they took their position a man, almost naked, his body glistening with sweat, crossed the opening and loudly hailed—

"Here comes a talk for Metaminens*!"

*"Little Indian Corn," Perrot's red name.

"A runner," whispered Carcajou, staring suspiciously at the man.

"A Potawatomi man. He can bring us no evil. He comes from the north."

Perrot slowly walked into the firelight and quietly said:

"Metaminens is here. If it is a medicine talk give it to me and take meat from the kettle. There are blankets for you to sleep in."

"It is a medicine talk," said the Potawatomi man; and he produced a folded piece of paper from his girdle; and, giving it to Perrot, he hurriedly made for the kettles.

Carcajou saw Perrot's face grow stern and gloomy as he read the writing. He threw up his head and asked one of the Frenchmen—

"Where is the bush loper?"

"He and the old man went into the woods."

Perrot snapped his fingers against the folded paper and walked back and forth, muttering half aloud. As he paused in making a turn within a few feet of Carcajou's hiding place the Wolverene heard him softly exclaim:

"Here is something that can't be covered with trade goods! This is serious. The fellow will get himself killed yet."

As he retraced his steps to the fire Carcajou hurriedly whispered to La Blanche:

"Go to him by the path. Say you have been upstream. I believe I had better stay here. Find out what is in that talk. I can hear ghosts laughing at me. Be quick!"

TO BE CONTINUED

MARCHIN'

***by* J. L. Chamberlain Jr.**

HIKIN' down the dusty road, through the cruel heat;
Springfields slung on shoulders, packs that chafe like hell;
Prayin' for a bit o' rest to ease my burnin' feet;
Dust that fills my nostrils with a dry an' chokin' smell.
Sweat that trickles down my face, burnin' scaldin' hot;
Thinkin' of my water an' how long it's got to last—
Wishin' I were back in my good ol' army cot.
God! I wish to hell that the cadence weren't so fast.

Strainin' up a heavy hill—never seems to end!
Pack must weigh a thousand pounds, rifle even more.
What a load to give a man!—bet my legs will bend,
Dust an' dust an' dust an' dust that fills my every pore.
An' still the column's ploddin' on with scrapin', thuddin' beat,
Their eyes are fierce an' shinin', their lips are tightly pressed.
O, damn the heat, an' sweat, an' dust, an' damn my burnin' feet!
Thank God! You get that, buddy? You get it, kid? We REST!

Author of "The Three Missing Men," "Ghost Lanterns," etc.

THE Triangle R's new hand was catching a horse.

Leisurely, whistling through his teeth, "Doughfoot" Wilson scratched his head, and looked over the small herd that slowly shuffled itself about the corral.

An ordinary looking bay with no markings appeared to be the nearest thing. Doughfoot deftly shook out the loop of his lariat, and shot it along the ground with an easy motion. The horse leaped ahead; the rope bounced into the air, the noose closing about the wiry forelegs. The horse stopped instantly.

"'Pears to be a quiet sort of goat," said Doughfoot Wilson to himself.

He approached the animal, recoiling his rope as he reeled it in; and fashioned a makeshift halter of the free end of the lariat. Next he tied the horse's head short to a post and very circumspectly applied the saddle.

The horse sawed back and forth uneasily, and swung about as Doughfoot tied the cinch, but this was a matter so commonplace that Wilson thought nothing of it. Nor did it bother him that the animal was head-shy, and attempted to rear away from the bit. He was still whistling through his teeth as he cast loose the horse's head and stuck a foot into the near stirrup.

In the next fraction of a second the whistling stopped.

A whirl and a jump—and the horse was off. Doughfoot would have been off too, before he was on, but his right hand had grabbed the cantle of the saddle. The reins whistled through the fingers of the hand that gripped the pommel, taking the skin with them.

Doughfoot managed to get his other leg over the animal's loin back of the saddle, but another spinning buck jerked it loose again. Yet, somehow he managed to get into the saddle, and got his foot into the lashing off stirrup.

Settling down into plain, honest bucking the horse progressed around the corral in short, hunching bounds, coming down on stiff forelegs in violent jolts. Doughfoot wished that he had picked some other horse, or hadn't got on at all.

Abruptly the animal changed its tactics and reared backward into the air. Doughfoot Wilson had enough; he had no desire to feel nine hundred pounds of horse jab the pommel of the saddle into his prostrate stomach. He swung himself clear and slid off.

Doughfoot looked around the corral to see if any one had seen this conservative feat of horsemanship.

Darn it! Sure enough, there was a booted, broad-hatted figure seated on the top rail of the corral. Casually, with a foolish grin, Wilson strolled toward the watcher on the fence. Then he hesitated,

and his mouth fell open as he received a shock. The watcher was a girl.

"G'mornin'," said Doughfoot.

"It's afternoon."

"Guess that's right."

An awkward silence followed, during which Doughfoot, for want of a better thought, whistled through his teeth, and with elaborate nonchalance climbed to a seat near her on the top rail. He cast a studious eye at the heavens.

"Looks like it might snow a little," he offered.

"Might."

Another silence.

"Guess you're Old Ben Rutherford's girl," said Doughfoot.

She did not deny that she was.

"Well, me, I'm Doughfoot Wilson. The new hand."

"That so?"

"Yep."

She made no comment on this, and Doughfoot felt embarrassed. After some thought he tried one more conversational sally.

"This here cow country ain't what it used to be, what with fences and the like."

She slowly turned her head and surveyed him with gray eyes as keen as any man's.

"Neither are the riders," Madge Rutherford remarked coolly.

Doughfoot flushed.

"Ain't no sense in leavin' a cayuse fall over on top of yuh," he contended.

"Didn't see any horse fall over," she said.

"Well, he looked like he was goin' to, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes. He looked like he might possibly, under certain conditions, begin to think about startin' to rare up a little, if he should happen to get around to it," she conceded.

Doughfoot squirmed.

"Gosh," he said, "ain't you satisfied less'n somebody gets kilt every *minnit*?"

"Oh, I wouldn't want you takin' any *risks*," answered Madge. She added, "Mebbe I could help you out, now, by takin' the edge offen him for you."

Doughfoot had not earned his name by any outstanding nimbleness of wit. He considered her offer innocently.

"Nope," he decided. "'Twouldn't be anyways right."

"Great suffering coyotes," said Madge Rutherford in a choked voice.

She hastily climbed down from the rail and made off.

As Doughfoot stared after her in amazement he heard her break into peal upon peal of uncontrollable laughter. An angry glint came into his mild blue eyes. One eyebrow lifted menacingly as he shook a fist at the saddled bay, now standing at the far side of the corral. He spat viciously.

"Why, you ornery, cow-colored, six-legged, pop-eyed pelican!" he apostrophized the animal. "Go to work an' make a monkey out of me, will yuh? Why—why——"

Words failed him. He jumped down from the rail and strode across the corral with a purposefulness such as his oldest friends had never seen.

"SEEMS like I heard you had some sort o' trouble with a horse, t'day," said "Whack-Ear" Banks that evening, as the punchers attacked their chow at the long plank table in the mess shack.

"Well," admitted Doughfoot, "I did fool around a little with a cross-eyed bay, what isn't exactly what you'd call bridle wise."

"Heard you got off eight times," persisted Whack-Ear maliciously. "Each time by the special request o' the horse."

"Four," amended Doughfoot gloomily. "Twice he rolled over, and once he like to fell over backward. No man," he stated weightily, "should ought to stick in the saddle when a bronc is rollin' over on the ground."

"What about the other time," Whack-Ear insisted. "Was he turnin' handsprings, mebbe?"

"Humph," said Doughfoot, doggedly devoting himself to his plate of beans.

"It was that 'ere Rattlesnake hoss," said "Whiskers" Beck, with his mouth full. "Didn't notice none of you boys pickin' him out fer yer regular strings."

"I never had no trouble with him," said "Dixie" Kane.

"No," said "Squirty" Wallace, not too loudly, "Not no more trouble than you'd 'a' had with a man-eatin' tagger climbin' trees an' a burr under the saddle an' the stirrups busted an' no bridle on an' his tail caught fire, an'——"

"I rode him, didn't I?" demanded Dixie Kane belligerently.

"Oh, yes," admitted Squirty. "You rode him. But was you takin' him where

you wanted to go, or was you jest goin' with him where *he* wanted?"

Dixie ignored this.

"That horse ain't been handled right," opined Whiskers Beck, spearing another potato with his knife. "I mind when I was ridin' my hoss, Crazy, ——"

"You ride all horses kinda crazy," Whack-Ear put in.

"You got to treat a hoss like Rattlesnake different," Whiskers went on. "Kindness—that's the ticket. Talk gentle. Give him a potato peelin', or mebbe a sour-dough bun. Go about it easy-like."

"An' mebbe get a rockin'-chair, and take the bronc on yer lap, an' try singin' him to sleep," suggested Squirty. "Oh pickles!"

"I mind," continued Whiskers, "when I was ridin' my hoss, Dizzy, ——"

"You ride *all* horses kinda——" Whack- began.

"Shut up!" barked Whiskers. "These 'ere hosses are what yuh might call the cayuse breed. They're like eggs, or some cowboy with a roll o' jack. Not much to look at, an' yuh cain't figger out what they're like till they're busted. On'y, some broncs cain't *be* busted. They'll holler an' buck an' roll an' bite an' fall on their back, till they're plumb wore to a frazzle. An' then they'll sulk. An' when they sulk—try to move 'em. Dynamite ain't no assistance."

"Never see a horse *I* couldn't bust," commented Dixie Kane.

"Young, ain't you son?" said Whiskers. "Young—an' ain't been about much. You'll see some. Not many mebbe. Some."

"I betcha I've rode more as a million horses," Dixie announced.

"Plenty men ain't never seen a non-bustable cayuse," agreed Whiskers. "Mebbe they's whole states what ain't got none of 'em in. But when you says there ain't no sech thing, you sure are coverin' a pile o' ground. Take this here Rattlesnake. You boys all tried him. Some rode him—some not. But he ain't did a lick o' work yet. An' mebbe never will, too."

"I never had no trouble with him," said Dixie Kane.

And Whiskers gave it up.

DOUGHFOOT WILSON did not stay long at the Triangle R. Ambition had come into Doughfoot's life, and was gnawing at his mind. Whack-Ear Banks found him less and less entertaining under the continual ragging that was Whack-Ear's delight. Day by day, Doughfoot became more dogged and preoccupied. Those who had known him well before his arrival at the Triangle R would have hardly recognized him now.

In former days Doughfoot had been a lazy, happy-go-lucky puncher, with a tuneless whistle in his teeth and a blank look in his eye. Now the coppery leather of his face had set into obstinate lines. Much of his spare time was spent with the Rattlesnake horse.

He would sometimes sit for hours at a time on the top rail of the corral, moping, staring at the refractory bay, and never whistling through his teeth at all. At other times he would spend the whole of a slack half day in and out of Rattlesnake's saddle.

At first his efforts to bring the bay mustang into useful submission drew an audience of entertained punchers, who sat on the top rail, rolling cigarets and shouting helpful suggestions and remarks.

After a few days, however, the outfit lost interest in the daily exhibition, there being too much sameness about the show. A wild thunder of stamping hoofs and the mad squeal of a horse at dusk would only bring forth a yawning comment: "Guess Doughfoot's annoying that Rattlesnake pony again. Sure enough off his nut."

"Something wrong with that boy," Whiskers would submit.

"Chinch bug, mebbe, crawled in his ear, and it's rattling round in his nut," Squirty Wallace would explain.

"Tough bronc, that Rattlesnake."

"I never had no trouble with him," invariably remarked Dixie Kane, until they had heard it so often that there was talk of lynching, or sitting on Dixie's neck.

Doughfoot was sensitive about his troubles with the Rattlesnake horse. A hundred times he had tried to put the animal out of his mind. The bronc haunted him, drawing him back to the fight with an irresistible pull. He hated the sight of the brute, and lived in dread of the moments that he spent on the animal's back. But for some reason that he could not understand, he always got back on. It was the beginning of a long war between a man and a horse.

During the third week, when all hands had lost interest in the affair, Madge

Rutherford, the daughter of the old man, frequently sat on the fence while Doughfoot worked with the cayuse. Doughfoot had never paid much attention to girls, and the unaccustomed surveillance got his goat.

Rattlesnake was enough trouble by himself, and Madge Rutherford's watchful gray eyes were too much. At the end of the third week Doughfoot drew his pay, bought the Rattlesnake horse from the old man for seventy-five cents and a chew of plug, and left.

Eight miles to the southwest of the Triangle R Doughfoot's trail carried him past an ancient crumbling butte a quarter of a mile to the west. On the peak of the butte, silhouetted against the sky he saw a solitary figure seated on a horse. The rider waved, and he guessed that it was Madge.

"Good guns," he muttered, jerking bitterly at Rattlesnake's lead, "ain't I never going to get away from the two of you?"

He pushed on.

FROM time to time bits of news drifted back to the Triangle R of Doughfoot Wilson and his Rattlesnake horse. Just before snow fell Charley Decatur stopped by in his search for a soft place to winter in. Charley had known Doughfoot before.

"D'jever meet up with a *hombre* name o' Doughfoot Wilson?" he asked.

"Kind of a loose wheel, all the time foolin' with a no-good pony?" Whiskers asked. "Yep. Kind o' nutty, when he was here."

"Well," said Charley, "if he was kind o' nutty when he was here, he was plumb off his bat when I seen him last. Somebody with somethin' ag'in' him had give him a man-eatin' wild-cat name of Rattlesnake, and the poor hunk of mesquite didn't have sense enough left to turn the darn thing loose."

"Rattlesnake gettin' meaner, is he?" Whiskers asked. "Bad enough when he was here."

"I never had no trouble with him," said Dixie Kane.

"Well," said Charley, "that bein' the case, Doughfoot has taught him a lot of new tricks. He now kicks, bites, strikes and tromps on yuh when you're down. To get any meaner, that horse'll have to learn to throw things, or else start wearin' a gun."

"An' Doughfoot," asked Whiskers, "how's he takin' it?"

"Doughfoot?" said Charley. "Aw, he jest moons around, scratches his head and tries it again."

Winter closed down on communications, but with the gathering of punchers for the spring roundup they heard of Doughfoot again.

"Doughfoot Wilson?" said old Ben Egan when the subject came up. "Yep. Run into a old shirt an' a pair o' pants by that name over Nevada way. Not doing so good, seems like,"

"'Smatter with him now?" Whiskers wanted to know.

"Cain't seem to take no interest in nothin' but trouble," Old Ben explained. "Carries his own brand along with him in the shape of a or'nary cayuse name o' Rattlehead."

"Rattlesnake," corrected Whiskers. "Mankiller, he was, when last seen."

"Rattlehead," insisted Old Ben. "You're thinkin' o' some other bronc. This 'ere's a real quiet kind o' kangaroo. Let's Doughfoot hang around his neck an' whisper in his ear, which same he does frequent. Real quiet horse in all ways 'ceptin' one."

"What's that?"

"When Doughfoot gets on him," Old Ben answered, "anything's liable to happen, an' most generally does."

"He don't strike no more?" Whiskers inquired.

"Well—" Old Ben seemed to reflect doubtfully. "Doughfoot had his arm in a sling, an' Rattlehead looked kind o' bunged up around the knees. Mebbe they come to some sort o' understandin'."

"Mebbe they did," said Whiskers.

"I never had no trouble with him," said Dixie Kane.

"No?" said Whiskers. "Well, you're going to have a sight o' trouble on *account* of him, if your memory keeps on failin' yuh thataway!"

As reports of Doughfoot and his horse trickled in from time to time the Triangle R outfit began to take an interest in the contest that its beginning had not won. The punchers now eagerly pumped every roaming cowboy for news of Doughfoot. Bets were made as to who should have the better of it—Doughfoot, or his mustang friend. Prevailing odds began at two to one on the horse, but later dropped to even money as time passed and they heard no indications of Doughfoot's giving up.

Dixie Kane did not bet. "Of course, if it was *me* tacklin' that cayuse—" he began. Hoarse shouts of wrath silenced him and he stalked off in a sulk.

It was a year from the time that Doughfoot and Rattlesnake had left the Triangle R, and winter was closing down, when word reached them suggesting that the long fight was drawing to a close.

"Yeah," said Slim Dupree, in response to Whiskers' questionings, "I know who 'tis you mean. He's spreadin' his blanket about sixty miles south."

"And did he," demanded Whiskers leaning forward, "did he have with him a long-jumpin', sunfishin', caterwaulin' cayuse, what wouldn't noways stay put?"

"Huh-uh," denied Slim.

"He didn't?" Whiskers sank back. "There goes four months o' my pay! So he give up that Rattlesnake horse, after all!"

"Oh, you mean Rattlesnake?" said Slim. "He has *that* hoss all right. Only he don't tally with no such description as you give."

"Is he broke?" asked Whiskers eagerly, taking heart again.

"Nope, he ain't," confessed Slim. "But struck me 'twasn't his fault. He's nothin' but a crow-hopper, that hoss. I could 'a' busted him in no time, *I* thought. Kinda obstinate, but seems like he's kinda discouraged, an' toned down, 'sif he couldn't put no spirit in his buckin' no more."

"What'd I tell you?" said Dixie Kane.

"That hoss is goin' to be broke," said Whiskers grimly, thumping his knee with a fist. "I can see where he's losin' out."

"Mebbe," said Squirty Wallace. "But sounds like Doughfoot is kinda dwindlin' off hisself."

"Did look kinda wore down, an' peaked," Slim verified. "Yep, *he* looked discouraged too."

"I bet my last cent a'ready," said Whiskers bull-headedly, "but I now bets my saddle on the man."

Whack-Ear looked dubious. "What if they *both* wear plumb out an' cash in?"

"All bets off," said Whiskers.

"All right, then," Whack-Ear agreed. "My saddle against yourn—an' I backs the horse!"

Then, one lowering November night, Doughfoot Wilson returned to the Triangle R.

FOR over a year, Doughfoot Wilson had wandered in the hills and plains of the cow country. He had given up working steadily in one place and lived by earning a meal or two here and a meal or two there as he roamed. "Grub-testing," the system is called. It's a tough life on a horse and Brownie, the little buckskin mare that he had ridden when first he stopped at the Triangle R had long since given out under the strain.

To replace Brownie he had won a horse in a poker game at Frozen Nose; and when the Frozen Nose horse had worn down he bought another for a song at Whistling Creek. Rattlesnake, too, showed effects of the restless traveling; he carried his head lower, and his ribs showed little superfluous meat. But in Rattlesnake the iron-hard, leather-tough constitution of the mustang breed was at its best and it saw him through.

Doughfoot had intended, in a vague sort of way, to go back to the Triangle R some day when the Rattlesnake horse was broken. He certainly had not intended to go back as he did—shabby, empty of pocket, leading Rattlesnake unbroken. But somehow his casual wanderings kept bending back, so that he had swung in a wide circle; and now, a year older but with nothing done, he was back. And though he had worked but three weeks with the Triangle R, he had the feeling of a worthless son returning home.

Rather shamefacedly, then, Doughfoot rode through the dusk toward the lights of the Triangle R. He heard no voices as he approached, and thought the men must be hard at work at their chow. Feeling a bit foolish, he rode up to Old Man Rutherford's little house, intending to ask to be taken on. A lamp was burning on the table in the dining-room, but no one was there. Still riding and leading Rattlesnake, he went to the mess shack.

Ready food was on the long plank table, food still steaming as it grew cold. Some of the men's plates were already filled. He chuckled as he noticed a knife stuck upright in a potato at the place where Whiskers used to sit, indicating that one puncher, at least, had taken an early lead. There was chuck, ready to eat—but not a soul to eat it.

"Hi, Cookee!" he yelled. "Hey, Slops!"

His voice rang hollowly through the mess

shack and the kitchen beyond. He dismounted and strode through the shack to the kitchen. No one was there. The cook's much-stained apron lay in a heap on the floor. A great pot of coffee was boiling over on the stove, and he set it off. Then he walked across the fifty yards of open space to the bunkhouse and found it deserted and dark.

"Humph. 'Sfunny," said Doughfoot to himself. "Where they all took off to? Couldn't anyways be a stampede." He scratched his head. "Rustlers, mebbe now? Didn't hardly think—" He stepped into the bunkhouse and struck a match. No, there was Squirty Wallace's rifle, in its old place over his bunk. Couldn't be any sort of a ruckus, or Squirty would have taken that. Real proud, he was, of his rifle.

Night was closing down. A chill breath of wind stroked the back of his neck, sending a shiver across his shoulders. "Spooky," he said to himself. A muscle twitched in his cheek. "I wonder, now. . ."

Doughfoot felt a sudden need for the company of his horses, and hurried back to the mess shack almost at a run. With his hand on his horse's withers once more he felt better, and stood listening. The night was still; he could hear the horses moving restlessly over in the corral. He heard a cayuse's angry squeal, and the thump of a hoof on ribs. By these familiar sounds he was somehow reassured.

"Shucks. Ain't nothin'. Some simple little thing."

Becoming businesslike, Doughfoot led his horses to the corral, spanked them in, and unsaddled. Then, toting his saddle, rope, and bedroll, he went back to the mess shack. "No use lettin' all this good grub go to work and catch cold." He picked himself the best seat, the warmest and choicest food, and started in. He was hungry and relaxed himself to the enjoyment of warm beef, fried potatoes and beans.

The *whuff* of a heavy breath startled him into dropping his fork, and a horse's head was thrust in the door. Doughfoot grinned.

"C'min pardner. Grub for one an' all. Got the same idea as me, did yuh?"

As if accepting the invitation the animal stepped through the door, a long nose stretched toward the platter of beans. Doughfoot stopped eating and stared. The horse was saddled and bridled—and walking about alone. He now observed that the horse was hurt—a red gash showed on his shoulder, attesting to an ugly fall. The story of the riderless horse was plain enough, but— Some hazy link of memory was forming in his brain. Where had he seen that bald face, that forked-off ear, that— Suddenly he knew. It was the horse he had seen Madge Rutherford ride.

He sprang up, oversetting the bench, and the horse bolted into the night. This, then, was the explanation of the unpeopled buildings, the open doors, the deserted meal. He wasted a moment in search of the ready-saddled horse, then snatched up rope and saddle and raced for the corral. Throwing the saddle over the bars of the gate he tumbled after it. A dark shape, hardly discernible in the now heavy night, moved near him, and he hastily shook out his noose and threw.

His hands fumbled in their haste as he saddled and bridled, and threw down the bars of the gate. Lashed by a fear he could never have understood, even had he time to think, he vaulted into the saddle and struck in the spurs. They shot out the gate, and then—the horse bucked.

A wild rage swept through Doughfoot Wilson, and he hauled up on the reins with a wrench that brought the animal's forelegs into the air.

"You ——!" he yelled, "you fool with *me!* Me, that have fought the fightin'est horse in America fer one solid year!"

He sputtered through his teeth as he fought, battling with the horse as he had never fought before, not even with Rattlesnake, in that long war between man and horse. Again and again he struck with rowelled spurs, and with all his strength strained to keep up the horse's head. There was no quarter now! And as he fought he knew that he would win.

As if in a final effort the animal swung round his head to reach for Doughfoot's leg with his teeth. And the rider, putting his weight behind his wrist, leaned down to crash his fist against the horse's head. The blow found the temple, and the brute staggered in his stride. Then, as he still bounded half-dazed, Doughfoot once more urged him on.

"Now, —— you, get gone!"

Under the merciless punishment of the spurs the horse straightened out and ran.

Where he was going, or what he was going

to do, Doughfoot had not planned. He only knew that he was riding on a blind search for something that he hoped with all his heart he would not find. In his mind was a picture of a lone figure, waving to him from a crumbling butte. Running, running, running, the horse drove southwest into the night.

FOR ALL the scare and speed was unnecessary. Doughfoot, when it was all over, could see that for himself. His guess in direction was correct; Madge Rutherford's horse had fallen in galloping down the flank of the crumbling butte. There he found her sitting on a pile of loose stone, nursing a wrenched knee and waiting rather peevishly for some one to come and get her. He carried her back uncomfortably in his arms on the pommel of the saddle, plodding slowly on his winded, exhausted horse.

No one noticed him much until Madge had been taken care of, and the punchers, riding in for want of light, began to think about something to eat. Whiskers held up a lantern at him as he led his tired horse up to the group that was collecting at the mess shack door.

"Great grief!" ejaculated Whack-Ear. "Great, overpowerin' grief! Do you see what I see, or ain't I no longer right in the head?"

Whiskers stepped forward to run a thumb over a faint scar on the horse's forehead. Doughfoot now realized that the center of attraction was not himself, but the horse.

"Yessir," said Whiskers, in a voice full of thankfulness and praise. "That's him!"

"Who?" asked Doughfoot.

"Rattlesnake!" chortled Whiskers. "Rattlesnake! Jest like me an' my money said!"

No one saw Doughfoot's jaw tighten, nor saw that muscle in his cheek twitch as he slowly turned and surveyed the horse at his side. When he spoke his voice was calm.

"Darned if it ain't!" said Doughfoot Wilson.

"Rattlesnake, huh?" said Dixie Kane. "Well, I never had no trouble with him!"

"Humph," said Doughfoot, shouldering his way toward the mess shack door. "Neither did I!"

Yarns on LIFE

by Bill Adams

A SEA RESCUE

THIS is the tale of a man who fell overboard, unseen; but heard as he yelled, falling terrified from one of the lower yards into the sea.

Clegg, the second mate, on the deck, heard his shrieks as he struck the water and, hearing him, vaulted the bulwarks and leaped into the ocean after him. As he sprang after the drowning sailor he also shouted, and some one, hearing him, sensing that a man was overboard, flung a rope to the sea. Clegg and the rope struck in the sea beside the fallen man, and Clegg, grasping him, though he was invisible in the darkness, grasped also the rope.

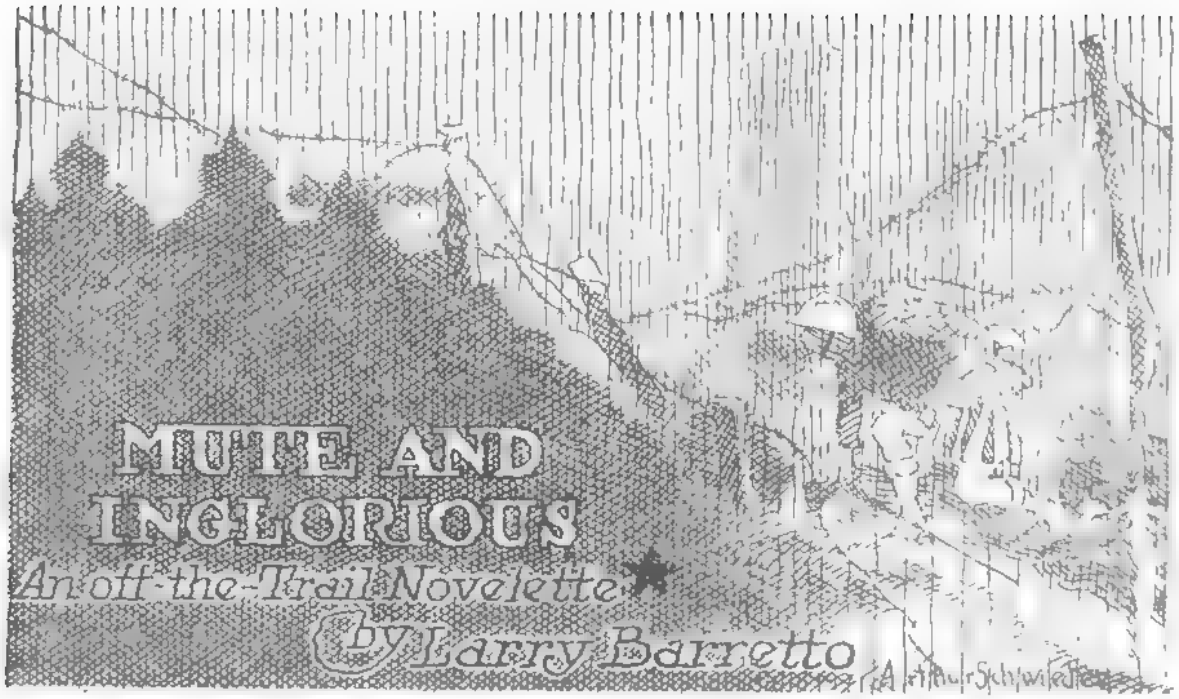
It was all done in an instant. Men on the deck hauled in upon the rope while others, hearing Clegg's voice from the sea, leaned over the rail and, standing upon the beading that ran about the ship's side, contrived to haul the two men back aboard—morsels snatched from the very jaw of old Death himself. When telling me this tale, Clegg's voice, speaking of the name of his old ship, held a very heartening ring in it—the old *Balclutha*.

When I seemed to demur at the apparent folly of this reckless deed Will Clegg, beside me in the dark, invisible in the torrential tropic rain, said to me:

"Billy, I got him!"

There was no more to be said. Surely no more was needed.

It was but an incident of the sea; one of the uncounted, unrecorded, incidents that have ever taken place where men face a life in which life and death walk ever hand in hand, their faces turned full upon each other.



FIVE years had passed before they met again—Henderson, who had been a lieutenant because he was a commanding figure and given to interpreting orders literally, with no humor and little understanding; and Lawton, who had remained a sergeant because to a certain degree he knew the minds of men. War does that often enough; you are intimate with a man to the point of brotherhood, then the call for demobilization sounds, and in the flurry of eagerness to return to a life which seems very new there is time for only a hurried hand clasp and quick, vague promises. Five years later one sees an arresting face in a crowd and hesitates. Recognition is not always instantaneous.

Lawton and Henderson stood on Broadway, where two lines of people filed past, jostling them wearily, and talked. Presently they realized that they were impeding traffic and crossed over to a neighboring café.

"Let's have a drink."

"Near beer?"

They smiled wryly, remembering what it would have been five years ago.

"Well, it will be cold anyway."

At a little table in the quiet room which was deserted Henderson became loquacious, even a bit boastful. He had returned to insurance, was doing well, and now he was the father of three children. He flushed with pride over this achievement. Lawton thought critically that his former lieutenant was too corpulent, no longer the gallant figure which gave distinction to his uniform—and pompous. But in the Army that had been an asset somehow. He himself was trying to induce large factory owners to install recreational facilities for their employees. Quick words of reproof rose to Henderson's lips, but he checked them. They were no longer on the old footing.

"But I thought you were an architect," he complained. "Something really high class."

"The war made a difference, you see, to me," Lawton answered with faint malice, and did not explain further before the look of incomprehension in the other's eyes.

The talk of present-day life became perfunctory and at last drifted back to the battles of long ago. Here they were on sure ground, for they had really little in common aside from the experiences they had shared.

"Do you remember Mont Kemmel?"

"And the spur of it—Mont Noir? Where the corpses were stretched in even rows before the shattered gate where we had our dressing station?"

"Oh, boy, I'll say I do!"

"And Westoutre. That hell-hole under shell fire."

It reminded Lawton of something.

*This is an Off-the-Trail story. See note at bottom of first contents page.

"Buck Stanley is dead," he said suddenly. "Last year—of pneumonia."

"No! I hadn't heard. That's too bad. Wasn't it at Westoutre he got his decoration? A fine boy, the ideal type of soldier."

They both remained silent, a little grave. This talk of death brought the receding war very close.

"I've always wondered if I might not run into Gus Mandell as I did you," Lawton said at last. "I'd rather like to."

"Well, I wouldn't!" the ex-lieutenant said vehemently. "That rotter! Spoiling the record of my outfit and trying to ruin morale. I hope I don't!"

His face flushed with passion, and his blue eyes sparkled. As he threw up his head the slight beginnings of a double chin disappeared. For the moment he was the complete officer again—that gallant figure which had commanded respect and inspired men.

"What a pity we can't die when we are young and splendid," Lawton was thinking as he watched him. Aloud he said:

"I've always felt that if we could have found the key to Mandell's character—a clew even—that it might have been different."

"It would not have been different, for there was no key," Henderson declared, but with less force now. "He was just plain no good."

It was absurd to get excited over a yellowback, and so long after. He glanced at his watch. Usually he telephoned his office at three.

"It was a perfect section, lieutenant, and you led it finely. Whatever happened was in no way your fault," Lawton said gravely. He saluted formally, then raised his glass to his lips.

"Almost perfect—except for Mandell," the officer conceded. "We'll drink to it."

II

GUS MANDELL had no business to be in the Army, for he had imagination. Properly trained and cultivated, it might have made him a staff officer, but for the position in which he found himself it was a curse. He was a private. This gift may have been bequeathed to him by some distant forebear, but there was no means of telling from what race he had sprung.

Indeed there was grave doubt as to whether Mandell was his real name. He was uncommunicative about that, and the recruiting officer who inducted him into the Army was concerned only with the fact that his muscles were in good shape and his heart was adequate. He listed him as Gus Mandell and administered the oath to him in company with a dozen others. Imagination was no concern of his.

Mandell had sprung as have a thousand other undistinguished beings from the slums of New York, struggled for a sufficient education and thereafter lived precariously on the edge of things, unknown and probably knowing few. He was a shipping clerk, which meant that he had "raised" himself, and his mother would have been overcome with pride had she been alive to see it. But she had died soon after Gus was born, of overwork and a slight beating administered by her drunken husband. It could not be said that the boy had good blood in him. He hadn't.

The position of shipping clerk where one stenciled boxes all day long, Beloit, Wis., and Kalamazoo, Mich., opened up tremendous possibilities for reverie, and Mandell dreamed so much over the fascination of these names that he was neither very industrious nor efficient, and it was easy therefore for the boss to let him out when war began with the curt suggestion that he enlist.

Lacking imagination, he might have joined any one of a dozen different branches of the service where he would have been lost in obscurity; but his thoughts were already aflame, and he selected a service then being formed, which was to be brigaded with the French Army to drive ambulances for them. It had its advantages. Ambulance driving did not sound particularly heroic, but there was one advantage in that the men were to sail immediately, and Gus Mandell had visions of graduating soon after into the Foreign Legion.

His lack of knowledge concerning warfare was profound. He mentioned this ambition to one of his companions, and the effect was unfortunate. In the Army, where loyalty to one's unit came first, this disparagement was resented; and in a section consisting of thirty men commanded by a lieutenant the words and actions of each member underwent a severe scrutiny.

"You'll be lucky if you're let to drive a

car, much less talking about getting into something better," said the man sharply to whom Mandell was speaking. He was a keen, alert fellow, quiet and self-possessed, whose name was Stanley—Buck Stanley he called himself.

"Is that so!" Mandell retorted and laughed. "I'll bet I get to be an officer before you do."

"I'll bet."

It was the keynote to Mandell's character. Long before they had sailed the men of the ambulance unit knew him to be an arrant boaster. He talked in large terms, and he raised his voice considerably above the others. In the surroundings in which he had been born this was good business. Opponents were likely to become silent before a loud and authoritative noise, and if they questioned what was back of it one could always withdraw, sometimes awkwardly.

His fatal gift of imagination had something to do with it. His facile mind, running ahead, created pictures of himself in precarious situations, as a hero or a martyr, leading lost causes, saving weak ones, but always as the central figure. He lived this dream life so intensely that he actually believed himself to be a part of it, and, having neither modesty nor breeding, he never knew when he was offensive. He was that almost always. Before the boat which took them across the ocean had landed at Brest Gus Mandell was cordially hated.

Buck Stanley had looked in silent contempt, noting the insignificant face, the shock of straw-colored hair, the indeterminate blue eyes, then he had stared at the other's figure with its heavy muscles and the ungainly limbs that apparently did not coordinate.

"Well, you're big enough at any rate," he muttered at last scornfully and turned away.

Even on the boat Mandell's performances did not live up to his promises. He argued with his bunk-mate, nearly got himself court-martialed, and during a submarine scare when the men were drawn up on deck waiting whatever was to come he was found in the officers' quarters ignominiously trying to fasten a life preserver about his bulky chest. He had lost his own and insisted that he was trying to obey orders by finding another.

He had no conception of discipline, and if an order was ever issued to him as an individual he invariably had a suggestion as to how it might be filled in a better way. Several bitter experiences at last taught him to keep his mouth shut before rank, but until the end he remained unconvinced.

There was a dreary period of six weeks at St. Nazaire while the men who were waiting for orders assembled cars. Mandell had announced himself as a mechanic, but he could not decently screw in a body bolt. He was an indifferent driver as well. Apparently he had reached the heights of his mental powers when he had learned to stencil names on packing cases.

The whole outfit was tense, nerves on edge with waiting. Mandell's clumsiness, his crassness, was more than ever noted and commented on. He was a disgrace to any outfit—twenty-nine regular guys and one boob—so there was audible relief when orders were received to go to the front.

Eventually the men found themselves in Flanders, encamped in the middle of the dirty village of Watou—a single street of brick and stone houses, deserted now by most of the inhabitants and turned over to the flood of divisions who were rushing up to repel the German advance on the Channel across that rugged mass of hills known as Kemmel, Noir, Rouge and Des Cats. All day and all night troops dragged themselves through the mud of the street where the ditches were so deep that a camion or a car backing over the edge was left as hopeless for clean-up squads to salvage; where all day guns of a dozen calibers, in hidden batteries extending far back, fired in a crescendo of deafening sound and where all night the horizon was rimmed with a semicircle of flame. It was a violent introduction to war, and the section trembled with excitement, eager as greyhounds.

The first night there was a call for three cars. The French division to which the American section was attached had not yet taken position in the lines, but the French ambulances of another division were hard pressed.

To a man the section volunteered. They were new at the game. Gus Mandell was the noisiest of them, crowding close to the sergeant who was giving out the assignment, vociferating that he be permitted this opportunity to distinguish himself.

It was with some surprize that the section saw Mandell chosen. Sergeant Lawton was a somewhat older man than the others,

with quiet eyes and ideas of his own. He believed that given the right inspiration, the right work, it was within the power of any one to make good. Mandell had puzzled him; he could not believe him quite as impossible as he seemed, and while the private had resisted the application of his theories so far Lawton was willing to give him his chance. This seemed to be the time.

"Flynn, Taylor, Mandell," he said briefly, and silenced the murmur of revolt with a gesture. He could enforce discipline when he chose.

Mandell was jubilant.

"Yeh, you bum drivers!" he mocked the others as he adjusted a gas mask about his neck. "I bet I get a cross tonight. Come on, Taylor, we'll show 'em."

Taylor drew away from him. Somehow the distinction of being the first driver out had gone now that Mandell was to be of the party. Sergeant Lawton was disgusted; already he regretted his choice.

"There won't be any decorations," he said. "You're not going to the lines. Here—" he drew a map to him—"you follow this road to the point I've marked. There on the left is a barn—the *triage*. Pick up the wounded there that the advance ambulances have left and bring them in to the hospital at Abeil. Nothing to it. They don't shell the place once a week. Now get going."

THE other ambulances were soon lost in the twilight, but Mandell drove slowly. For one thing he was not sure of his car, and for another the road fascinated him. Its narrow width was filled with troops, French going up, their faces with tight lips gleaming white under the dim blue of their helmets, and English coming back, shoulders sagging, exhausted and numb, their uniforms mud-smeared.

At the honking of his horn the solid mass opened miraculously, scrambling to the ditches to let his car pass and closing in behind it again. Ahead of him a horse lay by the roadside, its foreleg broken in a treacherous mud hole, a bullet in its forehead. Twenty soldiers tugged and sweated in improvised harness beside the remaining animal to get the gun to the front. Ammunition carts jolted along, their shells insecurely cased in wicker baskets.

"Golly!" gasped Mandell. "Golly!" He was inarticulate, lacking adjectives he had never known, but the pageantry of war had him and he was dreaming dreams again. What might not happen just ahead?

In a barren hop vineyard where the thin poles stuck up from the ground at grotesque angles a great gun vomited a solid sheet of flame, and the earth shook with the astounding roar. There was an open stretch of road ahead, and Mandell leaned far out from his car to see if the gun would fire again.

A jarring crash rewarded him, but the gun did not fire. The wheel under his hand, forgotten, had turned, and the ambulance had skidded across the road into a hitching post before a ruined *estaminet*. There it remained until passing soldiers, lifting it bodily, put it back on the road again. The fork had been badly bent and the wheel was no longer under control.

The car wabbled crazily from side to side while Mandell drove slowly back to the section headquarters, followed by the shouts and imprecations of soldiers he had nearly run down. He had left at eight, and he got back at midnight. Four hours on the road with not one wounded to show for it.

The outfit was in a fury. The men felt themselves disgraced—they were still new at the game—and the mechanics grumbled at having a car to repair. Within the month they would have repaired twenty, but they were new to war also. Lieutenant Henderson, an alert, rigid person who read little volumes on military tactics, had a few choice words to say on the subject.

"You'll keep off the cars until we absolutely have to use you, understand? The *triage* phoned in twice asking where the —— the third car was, and the first two had to be overloaded. Now you buck up, Mandell, or I'll find ways to make you. At rest." He was a conscientious man who felt that he had done his duty.

Mandell might have been forgiven if he had been humble and kept his mouth shut, but he blustered a defense.

"I just looked out at a gun an' the old thing skidded. The road was too narrow anyway. Why don't you give me a chance?"

He had been absolutely honest about the accident, for he never lied about events that were actually past. Imagination ceased there. It was only regarding the future that he romanced.

Eventually the ambulance section left

Flanders, and Mandell went with it. The men now felt that they had seen enough war to last them a lifetime, but they were only just beginning.

They had discovered as they grew more intimate that Mandell had one overwhelming ambition. He wanted a decoration. Most of them did, but he believed confidently that he would get it. That in itself was laughable, but when combined with his dubious record and his silly, vacant face it was almost intolerably absurd. The outfit yelled with delight.

"What the —— do you want a cross for?" Flynn demanded. "Perhaps it's for a woman."

"Aw, what girl would look at him?" a dozen men chorused.

For once Mandell kept silent. His big, clumsy hands clenched, and his mild blue eyes darkened. The section kept silent also. After all there were limits you did not pass, even with Mandell.

"I guess he has a girl all right. He writes to some one," Gilchrist confided to his bunk mate later. "Can you imagine her? A big, blowzy slob. She's probably horrible." He had a pretty taste in women himself.

Mandell had relaxed at last. Like a blundering puppy he was never angry for long.

"Well, I bet I will get a cross," he said, "if they give me a chance."

His chances were fewer now that the outfit had fallen into the routine of work, but he "got it" beyond Amiens. A push by the Germans designed to distract attention from some more important operation farther on brought all the cars into service and all the reserve drivers. Harkness had been gassed and evacuated. McGee was slightly wounded, and Richmond had been killed.

These were the first casualties, and the spirit of the outfit flamed higher than ever. The men felt that there was only one adequate answer—harder work, and the more hazardous the better. For the moment they were shaken by a passion of sacrifice; their own losses had brought the war closer.

"You're to have Richmond's car," Sergeant Lawton told him. "And for ——'s sake, boy, don't make a mess of things. Go out and show what you're made of. I've marked the roads, the car has been put in order, you know where the evacuation hospitals are. You *can't* go wrong."

Lawton was pleading with him, made desperate by the increasing flood of wounded and the exhaustion of the drivers, who after thirty hours of work slept at the steering gear, their faces caked gray with dust, drooping farther and farther forward while they fought to hold open their red-rimmed eyes.

"Don't you worry about me," Mandell assured him cheerfully. "I'll do fine."

He was stooping in front of the radiator as he spoke, about to crank the car.

"If you only do half way decently we won't ask any more of you," said Lieutenant Henderson dryly. He was standing nearby.

Mandell half turned, an indignant protest on his lips. The "loot" was always riding him. The car backfired violently, and the crank handle stopped short in its spin. There was a sharp snap. Mandell uttered an exclamation, straightened up, then bit his lip.

"Well, why don't you get going?" the officer demanded.

Without a word Mandell grasped the handle in his left hand. It was Lawton who pulled him back.

"You've broken your arm!" he exclaimed. It was true. His right arm hung limp and useless.

"I know it," Mandell said simply.

"Well, I'll be ——!" muttered the lieutenant and stared at him sharply.

"He did that on purpose," Henderson confided to his sergeant when Mandell, properly ticketed like any wounded and rather white about the lips, was driven off in another ambulance to the railhead and a base hospital, his arm bound tightly to his side in a sling. "He moved forward and let that handle catch him on the arm. We're having a dirty time of it and he knows it. I believe he's yellow."

"Oh, no, sir! I don't think so." Lawton was embarrassed. He never questioned the courage of any one, having no lack of it himself. "I don't believe it is possible. Why he was game enough to try to start the car with his left hand!"

"Bluff. He knew well enough what he was doing. I was watching him."

Before authority and against his convictions Lawton remained silent. For years after he regretted it at intervals.

"We'd better not mention it," he murmured. "It wouldn't be good for——"

"No, of course not."

The lieutenant lowered his voice also and

glanced about. But three men had heard, and within the hour every man in the outfit knew that Lieutenant Henderson had called Mandell yellow. If he said so it must be true. He was a hard-boiled guy, unbending and too strong on discipline; but he took care of his men, fought for them if need be and never demanded of any one work that he would not do himself. In consequence they worshipped him. His was a dramatic figure, alert, confident—never expressing doubts, for he never had any. If the lieutenant said Mandell was yellow, then yellow he was. From then on it became an article of faith.

III

WHEN Gus Mandell returned to the section, his broken arm knit again, there was a difference in the attitude of the men toward him which even he, as lacking in subtlety as he was, could not fail to notice. Before, they had accepted him, with reservations of course, as one of themselves. They had made him a target for their rough humor and had accepted his retorts in a friendly enough spirit. He was part of the outfit.

But six weeks was a long time. The memory of better men than Mandell might have grown faint. They were further united to one another by a thousand common experiences, many of them ordinary enough, in which he could not share; and there was no one to help him link up.

His bunk-mate, who had slept beside him for the sake of the extra blankets, had made other arrangements, and he declined with some embarrassment to return. Flynn would rather have slept alone than with a man who had the reputation for being yellow, although he did not tell Mandell this. None of them did. It might have cleared the air, precipitated a crisis, if the truth had been blurted out, but each man kept silent. It was as if they had taken upon themselves a part of his shame and the only way to forget it was to keep it secret.

The question of his fear did not enter into it necessarily. Every one was afraid at the front some time; in the midst of action men might do things which in the light of calm reflection would appear as cowardice—the desire to live is instinctive—but in a quiet area far from danger to permit your arm to be broken so that you might avoid the risk of helping comrades, hard pressed, was the ultimate sin. They could not forgive it, but they could ignore him. And they did.

Mandell may have known what it was all about; Sergeant Lawton, watching him, sometimes thought he did; but he, being a busy man, had hardly time to set the matter right. You couldn't make out payrolls, struggle with the French for provisions, arrange for new ambulance posts, and then try experiments in psychology.

Mandell made several pathetic and futile attempts to reinstate himself in his former position of sufferance. He inflicted himself on men who did not want his company, indulged in grotesque humor when it was tactless, and even attempted small services for the men. This was fatal. They accepted contemptuously the money that he loaned them when he had it and then forgot to repay it. Like a blundering dog he made the rounds, nosing anxiously at each indifferent hand, and then settled back disconsolate and alone.

He never grew sulky, for that was not part of his nature; but he became very quiet, and there was a look of bewilderment in his pale-blue eyes. He had been hurt, and he did not know the reason why. More and more he withdrew from the social life of the section, spending long hours alone, chin resting on clasped hands while he dreamed of things not put into words, or wrote those interminable letters in a scrawling hand which the lieutenant censored with an indifferent glance. Mandell was too stupid to be dangerous. The section might have forgiven him in time, for they were good-natured boys who could not hold rancor for long, had it not been for his splendid week. He called it that.

Sergeant Lawton had taken up his problem again with Lieutenant Henderson.

"There's nothing the matter with the boy except that he is misplaced," he declared. "He shouldn't be in this service where he is so much on his own. Put him in something where there is a man on his right and a man on his left so that he can't go astray and lose himself and he would probably perform marvels. He's big enough and strong enough. The Army has a genius for putting men in the wrong positions."

These were unfortunate words.

"I can't agree with you, Sergeant," the lieutenant answered stiffly. Usually they were on good terms. "If the Army accepted Mandell for the ambulance service it

doubtless had good reason for having him here. Of course I could transfer him out as you seem to be suggesting to me—" he paused to let this sink in—"but I don't like to admit defeat. I don't think he is any good myself, but I intend either to make him or break him."

He was very sure it could be done. He had read several little books that told how to do it.

Lawton suppressed a shrug. Sometimes he thought his lieutenant a fool.

"Very good, sir. I suppose he goes on post again."

They were stationed at this time in the village of Couloisy, a tiny hamlet in the Aisne Valley, from which roads like white ribbons, tree-lined, stretched in all directions—to Compiègne, to Soissons, to the river, beyond which the Germans clung to a plateau dominating the valley, and in the other direction back to the dark forests of Fleury and Villers where the Germans, infiltrating slowly forward, sought to create a salient that could not be snuffed out. Here in the forest and on the outskirts of it the ambulance section had its "*postes*"—the dressing stations and *triages* where the wounded were relayed back to hospitals a dozen kilometers away, and safety. One car to a *poste*, and as the forward car returned loaded with wounded another automatically moved up to take its place.

Mandell did excellent work. He neither burned out the bearings of his car nor wrecked it. He relieved the advance driver promptly when he flashed by the ruined wall, marked by a red cross flag behind which his car was parked, and was in turn relieved by others coming up from the rear. He acted with a certain distinction during a flurry of shell fire and might have received a decoration for it—they were given for less—if there had been anybody in authority to see him. He himself never reported it. What happened had seemed so much less in reality than in imagination that his act appeared to be of little consequence, and besides at this time he was not exchanging confidences with his companions.

IT WAS in this forest on the seventh day of Mandell's tour of duty that Buck Stanley, "the ideal soldier," came to ignominious grief. His car ran out of gas. The driver was responsible for the replenishment of his tank, but it sometimes happened, for one reason or another, usually forgetfulness, that it was not attended to. Generally it was not a matter of great importance. The driver settled back on his seat, lighted a cigaret, if it were not night with airplanes overhead, and waited for another car to pass him. It always carried an extra *bidon* of gas—enough to get the first car back to headquarters and a casual reprimand. What the wounded thought of these occasional strange delays was not known; they were French, either inarticulate with pain or philosophical.

At dusk on a Friday night Stanley ran out of gas. He was driving in from the advance post on the outskirts of the forest—a ruined lodge with a deep cellar known as La Fère—and had gone a mile beyond the second dressing station where Mandell was waiting when it happened.

Cursing a little at his stupidity, he drew his car, which was beginning to spit warnings, to the side of the road and waited. Mandell had seen him pass. It was fairly lively up front, and presently he would be back with a loaded car. Then the exchange of gas could be made, and they would both continue in. It meant that Mandell's *poste* would remain empty longer than it should since he, Stanley, could not warn the car at the third waiting place to move up, but that was unimportant. It was rarely if ever that anything happened there. This was a wide place where he had stopped; crossroads met here—one going on through the depths of woods to Villers Cotterets, the other wandering off into the distance, perhaps to Longpont, at any rate to territory in German hands.

The men inside the car grumbled a little to themselves at the delay. They were three lying wounded—*couchés* the French called them—then they became silent. A half hour passed. Mandell did not come. Stanley lighted a cigaret and threw it away half smoked. He was becoming nervous.

To the right far off sounded two crashes followed by a clatter as of tinware falling. The men inside the ambulance stirred uneasily on their stretchers. Stanley got down from his seat and walked to the middle of the crossroads, peering in the direction from which the returning car must come. The pale, crepuscular light falling through the heavily branched trees made the forest reaches still dimmer.

Two more shells sounded, nearer now—a whining sound followed by tearing crashes. Bits of *éclat* spattered on the road, throwing sparks from stones, and from the trees cut leaves drifted down—green moths fluttering. Inside the car the wounded men sat up a clamor:

"*Vite! Vite! Les obus' arrivent! Vite, Americain!*"

Stanley knew well enough what was happening. The Germans were searching for the crossroads, beginning their evening shelling of the traffic that might be there. Desperate, he ran back to the car and cranked it; a cough rewarded him, but the engine remained dead. He threw open the side box and pulled out the extra gas can, shook it despairingly and flung it from him.

Another shell burst, to the left of him this time, and where it exploded a thick column of black smoke rose and hung motionless before dissolving slowly. He choked at the bitter taste of it, and his eyes were filled with water. The men in the ambulance were wailing and shouting, knocking on the thin sides of the car, struggling to their knees and disarranging the bandages over their grave wounds in a torment of fear. Stanley ran to the back of the car and with frantic fingers tore loose the canvas curtain, wrenching at the tailboard, which was stuck. He was praying now, or cursing:

"Oh, God! Where is Mandell? Oh, God!"

At that moment Mandell's car slipped by. Buck Stanley saw it coming soon enough to run to the edge of its path, but not soon enough to get directly in front of it. He would have flung himself down before it if possible, allowing the wheels to go over him—anything to get help for his wounded men—but there was not time. Mandell's pale face was more vacant than ever; his eyes, staring straight ahead, were seeing visions while the car reacted to the movements of his automatic fingers. Stanley could have sworn that he turned for a moment and looked at him as he stumbled forward, flailing his arms and uttering hoarse cries; he did swear it, but it was darker now, the acrid smoke from the shells hung in a mist, and the shrieking whine of more shells might have drowned his voice.

For a moment Stanley ran after the disappearing ambulance, fell to his knees, then rose and returned to his own. He was blaspheming horribly, his chest rising and falling in great gasps. To his credit he never even thought of trying to save his own life. During those chaotic minutes in which he lived and died many times his thoughts were only for the wounded, those helpless men squalling and praying on their stretchers.

He had got the tailboard down at last and had dragged out one of them in his arms when the crash came. What he meant to do was vague in his own mind, but somehow he thought to carry them to a safe place deeper in the woods.

There was a shriek which began full grown, not in a faint wail, a mighty wind before which the trees seemed to bend, then an explosion that rocked the earth and shattered it. Stanley had only time to fling himself down in the ditch, the wounded man beneath him, trying instinctively to cover him with all his body.

When it was still once more he rose slowly to his knees. There was no sound in his ears, and he believed he would never hear again. Bits of branches still dropped from the trees.

The ambulance had gone almost; shattered remnants of twisted steel and splintered wood made a mass of débris, and from it protruded what remained of the two wounded men, the dim white of their bandages darkening under the flow of new blood. In the ditch the third wounded man moaned feebly as he patted his body for new hurts. Here ten minutes later the car from the last dressing station, moving up, found them. Stanley was still kneeling, his face blank with horror, his coat torn by shrapnel, but unhurt.

It caused an uproar in the section. Stanley, frantic with grief and rage, burst in on the lieutenant, his face still smeared with a yellowish powder—the shell had been as close as that. Why he was not dead was a miracle.

He gasped out the story, stammering, pausing in the account to blame himself bitterly. The death of the men entrusted to him had unnerved him completely. He had forgotten the gas and was primarily responsible. They could court-martial him if they liked or transfer him out of the section. He begged to be made a stretcher bearer—anything to undo what could never be undone. He had forgotten the gas—he returned to that again and again like a refrain—but Mandell had not stopped.

He saw him, and he did not stop. One minute would have made all the difference. They could have transferred the men and abandoned his car. He sank down on the officer's traveling trunk without permission and covered his face with his hands.

Lieutenant Henderson's face was carved into grave lines and still, like that of an image. Only his bright eyes were glowing. The lantern light gleamed dully behind him on his silver shoulder bars, touched his polished puttees and outlined the slim waist drawn in by a Sam Browne belt. He was the complete officer meting out justice, a figure to inspire worship.

"You say that Mandell saw you and did not stop you? You are sure?" His voice was frozen, crackling with a terrible cold.

Buck Stanley straightened and took his hands from his face.

"Why, yes, sir," he answered, a touch of surprise in his words. "He looked at me and drove on. They were shelling heavily, laying a barrage across the road, you know."

"Send for him," the lieutenant ordered.

The sergeant stood in the doorway of the room which opened out into a larger room of the farmhouse where the men had their quarters. Behind him a dozen men peered on tiptoe, eager to hear what was going on.

Mandell entered, an awkward figure, slovenly and unkempt, one spiral trailing loose from his leg as usual. His stupid face showed only bewilderment at Lieutenant Henderson's accusation.

"I didn't neither," he declared. "I didn't see him."

He was appalled by what they said. Secretly he adored Buck Stanley—a glamorous figure for hero worship.

Confronted with irrefutable reasons why he should have seen Stanley, chivvied by a torrent of words, he could repeat stubbornly only, "I didn't see him," while he twisted his red hands, trying to conceal his ungainly wrists in the sleeves that were too short.

"I'm going to have you court-martialed," the lieutenant declared at last. Passion was rising in him. "Sergeant, make out the papers."

Sergeant Lawton interposed. He knew rather more about military law than his officer.

"It is only the word of two privates against each other, sir. No witnesses; and besides I question if there are grounds."

Lieutenant Henderson hesitated.

"Very well," he said at last. "For the sake of the outfit I am glad to avoid that. Mandell, you have shown yourself unfit to be a driver. Aside from intelligence we need a moderate degree of courage—" his voice held biting sarcasm—"so in the future Gilligan will take your place on the cars and you will be a cook."

A look of horror spread over Mandell's face. The humiliation of it was terrible. He saw those chances for the cross he coveted for some one fading. He had been proud to be a driver. And now, to peel potatoes!

"I don't know how to cook," he muttered sullenly.

Lieutenant Henderson's face became crimson. He choked; it seemed as if the collar of his tunic was too tight for him

"By——! You'll learn or we'll find ways to make you! Now get into your denims and go to work!"

Sergeant Lawton, watching by the door, believed that Mandell was going to weep, and had a faint sensation of nausea. He hoped that might be spared it. The man's face screwed up into a knot, and he blinked his eyes as if to keep back tears. Then he opened them and stared at the row of hostile faces. A faint, embarrassed smile touched his lips.

"Well, it's been a splendid week," he said feebly to nobody in particular and shuffled from the room.

That night he stood behind the mess table shoving hash on the plates of the men who filed before him. Buck Stanley paused a moment, still shaken by the experience of the afternoon.

"You coward!" he said shrilly. "You coward!"

Gus Mandell did not answer. He turned silently to the next man, and now his eyes were filled with tears the others could not see.

IV

THE summer drifted past, and with it came a turn in the tides of war. The pressure was relieved on Villers Cotterets, and Compiègne was once more safe to drive through. Soissons was hotly invested by the allied forces, and the Germans, contesting every step, were being slowly forced back from the lip of the plateau above the river Aisne. Almost daily

villages with strange names were again placed in French keeping: Tigny, Taux, Tartiers and Nouvron.

The allied offensive was in full swing. Fresh troops were crowding into the broad valley with its rim of faintly smiling hills—Senegalese and Territorials, Scotch and Americans, more French, and there was a rumor that the English were to the east. There was to be a great attack. Day and night the roads were filled with guns moving up, and crowded with troops, ammunition carts, provision wagons and camions through whose camouflaged tops soldiers peered, drawn in from the frontiers of war —Belgium and the Vosges. There was hardly any concealment. The Germans, watching from their airplanes and balloons, must have known all.

The ambulance section tightened their belts and looked to their cars. As usual before an attack they were on their toes, jesting nervously with one another, offering bets as to who would be the next to swell their casualty list.

Only Mandell remained apathetic, moving clumsily about his field kitchen preparing food and drawing water from the well. He seldom spoke now, only smiling shyly at the men who addressed him as if to assure them mutely that he was not such a bad fellow after all. He seemed happier, however; perhaps he had found some secret consolation in his situation.

The attack opened surprizingly at four o'clock in the afternoon, and through field glasses a group of Americans watched it across the valley of the Aisne. For three miles the plateau was a mass of exploding shells. Great puffs of smoke, white, gray and dun-colored, spurted and the sharp crackle of artillery sounded like a brush-fire. It would seem as if nothing could endure under that systematic destruction. Lieutenant Henderson glanced at his watch.

"They won't need extra cars until the barrage lifts," he said. "But after that there will be a rush all night. Our division goes over at seven."

He turned to Mandell.

"See that coffee and hot food is ready from nine on," he ordered briefly. "The men will be worn out."

"Yessir," Mandell answered and turned again to the potatoes he was peeling. One did not salute at the front.

The German lines, however, were not so easily pierced. The picked troops that held them withdrew under the barrage and returned again later to contest the advance. If they were driven from the plateau it meant that they would have to fall back on a terrain with wretched roads of communication and no spots where the country might be commanded.

There was plenty of work for the ambulances. By nine o'clock tired men began appearing at the kitchen, clamoring for food and hot coffee. They had missed the evening mess. Mandell was not there, and there was no food and no coffee. A search was made, but he could not be found. Grumbling, they returned to their cars and drove off, their spirits depressed. Hunger is bad for morale.

At ten the second shift coming in found the coffee just about to boil and warmed-up remnants of the evening meal waiting for them. Mandell was back on the job with no excuse for his absence. It was a slight matter and would have been forgotten, but the lieutenant had noticed it. He said nothing, however. Perhaps he was beginning to despair of ever making Mandell conform to military standards.

Next day the attack continued unabated, but by nightfall it died down. Already it was necessary to withdraw exhausted troops and replace them with fresh ones. The struggle up and over the lip of the plateau had been at a killing pace.

All was quiet save for the intermittent shelling. Not more than five ambulances were at the lines, and the remaining drivers lounged in the room of the farmhouse, thankful for the few hours of relaxation. It was very peaceful. Lieutenant Henderson was in his office censoring mail. He entered the room so quietly that the men had hardly time to get to their feet. In his hand he held a batch of letters.

"At ease," he said, and paused while they sank back again.

They waited for what he had to say while he glanced about the room, at the windows covered with blankets to keep out the light, at the guttering candles stirred by a faint draft, at the faces of the men which he searched with his keen gaze.

"Last night," he began deliberately, "I gave orders that food and coffee should be ready for you when you came off duty. Those orders were not obeyed and some of you missed out. This is the reason:

Mandell was writing letters. I am going to read you what he says——"

In his corner Mandell half rose from the stretcher on which he was lying, his hand outstretched, an inarticulate protest on his lips. It died there, and until the end he kept silent, staring straight ahead of him, avoiding the glances of the men. Lieutenant Henderson began:

"MY DEAREST ELLA:

"In reply to yours asking why I have not wrote you of my adventures at the front I will now tell you of the hot time we had last night. Ella, we are in for a big attack. More troops than I ever seen before are here and lots of guns. All the cars are on the job and mine was the first out. When I crossed the river near here, I don't dast to say the name, the pontoon bridge was under fire and part of it was gorn. It was fierce. On a hill there is a village called H which is a small town and on a hair-pin turn I stalled my car. It was just as well because there was some wounded in a field and I brought them in. There was a heavy gas cloud and I wore my mask. I dont want you to think I aint doing my duty as I am. If I dont write you each time of things hapening it is because there is none. About that cross you wanted I have not got it yet but have hopes——"

There was more—pages of it, and the lieutenant read it through to the last words—

"With my best love,
Yrs truly,
G. MANDELL
P'v't 2d Cl., S. S. U. 5"

Before he had finished the men were in gales of laughter, and at the end they were writhing in convulsions. It was the funniest thing they had ever heard—a complete tissue of lies, pieced together out of experiences of their own. And to be written by Mandell—Mandell, the scrubby cook who had not driven a car for months, who had never been to Hors or crossed a pontoon—who knew as much about a gas cloud as he did of modesty! It was rich. They rolled on the ground gasping and moaning. With difficulty the lieutenant quieted them.

"My duty," he said, holding the monotonous voice in which he had read the letter—like that he used for army orders—"is to censor your mail so that no information of value to the enemy may get through. Beyond that I do not go, and I try to read no more than is necessary. Some of you draw a pretty long bow about your experiences, but I ignore it. That is your business.

"In this case, however, since the writing of this letter prevented the proper functioning of the section, I am going to take it upon myself to censor it entirely—as much for a lesson to Mandell as in the interests of truth. I shall send the beginning and the end."

With slow fingers he tore the letter until there remained two strips—"My dearest Ella," and "With my best love, Yrs truly, G. Mandell." These he placed in the envelop and sealed it.

Mandell struggled to his feet. His face had gone the color of putty; his mouth opened and closed in gasps, but he did not speak. His raw, red hands stretched out in a gesture of appeal. Sergeant Lawton, in the background, could think of nothing but a hurt animal, dying silently. Then before the continued laughter his arms dropped, his head sank forward on his breast, he stumbled to the door, opened it and went out into the night. The last words he heard were those of Buck Stanley whom he had adored in secret:—

"I guess that'll hold him for a while."

V

EVEN Mandell must have known now that he was a man bankrupt of honor, the butt of the section, a creature beneath contempt who had been made a cook because he was fit for nothing better. As if a film had been washed from his eyes he saw at last the meaning of their careless scorn, their good-natured tolerance, and he was filled with a steadily mounting pain. It had enveloped him entirely. As he blundered along the high road to Soissons that stretched a pale line in the darkness he began to sob deep down in his chest, and an inarticulate murmur of words rose to his lips:

"If on'y some one believed in me! If they on'y believed!"

His eyes were smarting with tears, and he closed them tight while he trudged on.

The village of Couloisy dropped away from him, a gray smudge in the darkness, and then was swallowed up. A fine rain began that misted his clothes and covered his face with drops of moisture. Across the Aisne a star shell flared, an unearthly white, dropping slowly, then was suddenly submerged, plunging the country into deeper blackness than before.

Mandell did not know where he was going, nor did he care. His brain held no

desire but to escape from that mocking laughter which rang in his ears. At the *poste* of Vache Noire he saw the outlines of an American ambulance waiting for a call and shrank back farther against the bushes although no one could have seen him. Beyond this point the road was strange, but he did not hesitate.

By the time he had reached Jaulzy the pain in him had given way to anger. Bitterness at the injustice he had suffered rankled and festered. An idea was forming:

"I'm through with the whole —— outfit. They don't give you a chance. I'm goin' to quit." Then:

"The Army's all the same. I'm goin' to desert. I'm goin' over the hill."

His wild imagination leaping ahead already saw himself free from it all, back in the security and comfort of civilian life, stenciling packing cases perhaps, even while his footsteps lingered on the outskirts of Jaulzy. But back of it all was the conviction that he really wasn't any good, that being worthless there was no use trying.

Jaulzy was given over to the Scotch, who were quartered there. For a week they had waited orders, meanwhile washing their clothes and making strange squealings on bagpipes. Mandell, slipping through their village, paused to peer through the window of a house which was faintly lighted.

The room was empty. There on a chair he saw a uniform—the plaid kilts, the short coat with its brass buttons, stockings and even a cap with its tips of black ribbon trailing behind—and a new idea was born. He would steal that uniform—wear it himself. It was a precaution anyway. Back from the lines the area was filled with Americans coming up. There would be provost guards stationed at every crossroads and officers passing in staff cars. Guards and officers asked inconvenient questions which he was not prepared to answer. There were few Scotch about, and these he could avoid. The uniform would be a protection until he could slip through to safety.

Cautiously he opened the door and entered. No one disturbed him. Quickly he caught up the garments and disappeared as quietly as he had come, closing the door behind him. Mandell had no scruples about this theft; his ethics were not good. Concealed in a copse of woods, he made the change. He had difficulty in finding the fastenings, but at last he stood erect in the uniform of a Seaforth Highlander. His knees felt cold and wet. Then he bundled up his own uniform and hid it under a log where it would rot, losing form and color in the dampness.

Finally he took off his identification tags and flung them far from him. It was a gesture. Mandell was through with the American Army.

But not entirely however. An hour later found him sitting wearily by the roadside, remembering the men at Couloisy. He had no wish to return to them; they had kicked him out; but he thought about them. It was cold out here in the dark, and lonely.

"I'll just sit here till morning when I can see where the —— I'm goin'. I'm lost all right now," he thought.

Presently he slept. When he awoke, troops were filing past him, the soft *plop plop* of their shoes squelching in the mud. Mandell peered until he recognized them as French. Almost an entire regiment had passed before he decided to speak; a craving for companionship was on him.

"*Où allez vous?*" he demanded, standing up. He knew enough French for that.

The men nearest him started slightly at this apparition that rose from the ditch, but they were not alarmed. They were accustomed to surprizes.

"*Permission. Boul'Miche'*," one of them answered, and there was a low growl of laughter. This was Savatier's 34th, composed of the scourings of Paris, men of the underworld who fought desperately, when they had to.

Mandell was relieved. He was in luck if this regiment was going on leave, and he knew all about the Boulevard St. Michel. He had been there.

"Well, I'll just go along a ways with you," he exclaimed cheerfully and fell into line beside them.

The words spread through the column: "A lady from hell is with us," and men turned to peer back through the gloom at the tall, ungainly Scotchman, then faced forward again, their shoulders bent under their packs.

"He'll bring us luck," some one muttered. "Perhaps he is lost." A song was started—"*Sambre et Meuse;*" but a bearded man stopped it at the first bar.

"Not that. Tomorrow perhaps—those who are left."

He began "*Madelon,*" and other voices joined in:

"Quand Madelon vient nous servir à boire,
Sous la tonnelle on frôle son jupon.
Et chacun lui raconte une histoire,
Une histoire à sa façon."

Mandell joined with them, humming the refrain, of which he did not know the words. He was happier than he had been for many weeks. These men knew nothing about him. He felt himself their equal. After a time a stern voice from the head of the column called out, "*Attention!*" and the men relapsed into silence, plodding on hour after hour, mile after mile.

Beside Mandell a French boy walked, staggering a little under the weight of his pack. He would drop back a step, then hurry to catch up again. It was evident that he was very tired. His face was a white blur and thin, and at intervals a racking cough shook him. The American thought he looked under weight, under age and underfed.

"If I had the little —— in my kitchen I'd feed him up right," he said to himself, and then remembered that he had no kitchen.

"Here, gimme that pack," he said with rough good nature, "and the gun too. They're too heavy for a rat like you."

He removed them from the boy's shoulders and slung them across his own. Later a hand was slipped through his arm and the boy supported himself while he limped. They grinned at each other in the darkness.

Once an order came and they dropped by the roadside for fifteen minutes to eat. The boy shared his bread and wine with Mandell, and the spirit of comradeship grew between them.

It was not until the pale dawn was beginning to streak the sky and the outlines of barns and farmhouses began to show dimly through the white mist that Mandell suspected anything was wrong. This was a part of the country with which he was not familiar, but it did not seem like the road to Paris. Most of the houses were ruined; a shattered town lay before them; instead of growing fainter the rumble of gun fire sounded louder; there were no civilians about.

"Hey, where we goin'?" he asked uneasily.

The marching column did not answer. It was deploying past the edge of the town, from which other men in blue uniforms were hurrying out to meet it and skulking quickly to the rear. The 34th was spreading out and taking over the lines. A *sous officier* came up to Mandell.

"You must leave at once, Scotchman," he said in rapid French. "We are going to attack the Château de Buzancy." He motioned toward a hill beyond the town, still mist-covered. "You should rejoin your regiment."

Mandell listened intently, his head cocked to one side.

"I don't get a single word you say, buddy. Not a word," he complained mournfully. "Are we goin' over the top?"

The boy beside him interrupted impatiently.

"What is it to you, Bullin, who fights and who doesn't? Let him remain. Perhaps he will bring us luck. We will all be killed anyway. Who ever heard of attacking without a barrage?" His voice was bitter.

"Only the 34th would be forced to do it," another man answered. "Savatier thinks to plan a surprize. The old fool!"

The corporal shrugged.

"Get him a gun," he answered and hurried away.

MANDELL found himself in a slight grove of trees with the French boy and three other men, who were handling their rifles and tightening their belts with nervous fingers. Beyond him he could see faintly through the mist the outlines of a church, its roof fallen, gaping holes in the walls, the steeple leaning crazily. To the right of it spread out the village of Buzancy, a wrack of broken houses whose walls bulged out at obscene angles and whose streets were powdered thick with chipped limestone.

They waited for twenty minutes, squatting. On the left a shot sounded, and the men straightened. As if it were a signal there came the *swish* of a shell, followed instantly by a sharp explosion.

Mandell threw himself forward on the ground. The Frenchman beyond him who had been kneeling sat down, and a foolish look spread over his face. A thin trickle of blood showed at his neck, and he touched it with unbelieving fingers. Presently he fell over on his side and kicked for a moment. The boy beside Mandell pointed to the dead man's rifle with a shaking hand.

"Your gun," he whispered.

Mandell reached out and took it, handling it awkwardly, touching the point of the fixed bayonet.

"I bet I can't load it," he muttered, "an' I never fired one."

Nevertheless he grasped it tightly.

It was the boy who; creeping cautiously, removed the helmet from the corpse's head and gave it to Mandell, who discarded his Scotch cap. Another seventy-seven cracked, and from the tree-tops branches showered down.

"Golly!" he muttered. "This is no place for me. Come on. Let's go!"

He started forward at a loping run. Behind him trotted the boy. The two remaining Frenchmen looked at each other and rose to their feet, following more slowly. At once the whole line began to move. The *rat-tat-tat* of machine guns aimed high broke out and behind them the splitting crack of French seventy-fives.

Mandell reached the edge of woods, and before him stretched an open space. He felt as if the eyes of all the German Army were on him, and so he ran faster.

"If I could get my hands on that bird that said we were goin' on leave!" he muttered.

He was conscious of firing his gun again and again until there was only an empty click. From the hill above, a storm of fire broke out. Machine guns, raking right and left, peppered the village; there was a hum of rifle bullets in the air and the staccato bark of seventy-sevens. The Germans had not been surprized. On the lower slopes of the hill white puffs appeared, and when the smoke had cleared there were gaping holes.

Mandell had crossed the open space at last and was beyond the church when the mist lifted. There above him stood a white building a quarter mile away, its walls scarred, one wing crumbled into ruin, the windows black and sightless eyes. Before it a tangle of wire showed, and the gray mounds of trenches. Figures were visible for a moment—scurrying, dressed in dim green—then the mist shut down again.

There was the roar of an explosion that rocked the earth, and Mandell flung himself into a shell hole. A moment later the boy dropped beside him. They were both gasping for breath, their eyeballs straining. The other men had disappeared. Mandell and the boy were in the graveyard of the church. About them were broken stones and bent wreaths and crosses made of black, white and purple beads strung on frames. The ground had been furrowed into craters, and here and there bits of human bone and rotting wood stuck out. There was a damp odor.

Looking behind, Mandell saw that the blue line of men had passed the town and was struggling up the slope. They were falling now, by ones and twos, like clumsy bundles of cloth. A priest, his black cassock tucked about his armpits, showing the uniform beneath, his helmet gone, ran from one to another, kneeling and holding a crucifix while he muttered words.

Before the intensity of the fire from the hilltop the men wavered and drifted back toward the village until only still figures remained. The priest was the last to retreat, carrying a man in his arms. An officer's voice could be heard screaming exhortations. Comparative silence followed. Only a Chauchat gun, placed in the upper window of an advance house, purred viciously.

Above the graveyard the clatter of a machine gun broke out. Mandell could see its emplacement dimly—a mound of earth littered with barbed wire. Swinging to right and left, it fired so low that he had to lie flat while he listened to the whine of bullets overhead. He was sick with fear, his stomach retching with nausea. His cheeks had sucked in until his tongue seemed swollen, and there was the taste of brass in his mouth. He would have crawled away, but he dared not.

The thought came to him:

"The loot's right. I'm yeller."

He glanced down at a sound. Beside him the little French boy was sobbing, his body shaking with trembling he could not stop. His ugly gamin's face was livid and streaked with dirt. Only his eyes seemed human. They beseeched Mandell piteously, and there was confidence for the big "Scotchman" in them. The man's fear left him. He felt a thrill of pride in this trust.

"Why the little ——'s scared stiff!" he thought.

He touched the boy on the shoulder.

"Come on, kid; we can't stay here. Let's go get 'em."

Immediately he began to crawl out of the shell hole, and like an obedient dog the boy scrambled after him.

Mandell did not know whether it took

a minute or an hour to cover the ground to the machine gun. He was shouting and yelling, leaping from side to side. Behind him the boy fired once, and a German toppled across the emplacement. The American felt a sharp sting in his left arm, but forgot it.

Now he was in the wire, which tore at his hands and rippled his kilts to tatters. He was conscious of two Germans peering down at him with startled faces. They probably had not known he was so close. Then he crashed in on them, his bayonet clenched tightly. One of them fell with the knife through his chest and the other threw up his hands, whimpering. His eyes were agonized. The machine gun had stopped chattering. Mandell placed his foot on the body of the dead man and wrenched out his weapon.

"Attaboy!" he shouted and thrust it through the last man's vitals.

Below them the troops, encouraged by this forlorn advance, ventured forth again from the shelter of their walls.

Mandell straightened up and reached out a hand to help the boy struggling in the wire.

"I'll tell the world—" he began, his face grinning.

There was a roar beside him and Mandell stopped short, the words unuttered. Something had happened. The hand of the boy below him was fading away; there was a burning feeling in his side, and his bare legs were warm and wet. He was slipping slowly to his knees. For a moment he knelt there, looking out over the village of Buzancy, which seemed curiously far away; then he sank back, his face upturned. There was a confused shouting and a rush. Men were passing over and beyond him; then quiet.

Gus Mandell spoke three times. His outstretched hand across the body of the German, whose entrails were dripping down the hill, touched a decoration which the man, more brave than cautious, had worn, and his stiffening fingers clutched it.

"My cross," he muttered, not knowing it was an Iron Cross. His ethics were never good.

The sun rose and burned the mists away. An airplane, a speck against the blue, looked down on the morning carnage.

"Water! said Mandell hoarsely. "Water!"

A shadow was between him and the sky, and he opened his eyes. The French boy, his foot wounded at the château, paused beside him. A gleam of recognition passed between them. Mandell boasted for the last time.

"I put you through, kid," he said clearly. "Anyway I put you through."

Presently he died quietly.

The boy looked long and earnestly at the calm face of his dead friend so that he might not forget it. Then he stumbled away toward the rear, dragging his wounded foot and sniffling a little. He felt very lonely. War was a terrible thing, and he was only seventeen.

That evening some old stretcher bearers, returning from the new lines to bury the dead, found Mandell. And because he was a heroic figure who had brought luck to the 34th that day they built a monument to him—made of smooth blocks of white limestone taken from the château, piled six feet high. It was quite crude. One of them scratched on it a rough picture of a thistle rising between two roses on the same stalk, and under it the inscription in French:

Here will flower again a glorious Scotch thistle among the roses of France.

When Mandell had been absent for thirty hours Lieutenant Henderson called for a report. Sergeant Lawton looked gray and weary.

"I've been all over these roads myself," he said, "and I've sent ambulances back to all the hospitals where he might be—Verberie, Royalieu, Pontrain and even Senlis. He isn't at any of them."

The lieutenant's lips tightened.

"Very well," he said harshly. "Mark him absent without leave. He's a deserter."

Sergeant Lawton ventured a suggestion:

"Might I say 'missing in action,' sir? There's the matter of his insurance—" He hesitated. "It's made out to that girl."

"Certainly not," the officer answered sternly. "Sergeant, you know the regulations as well as I do. He has deserted. By now the yellow dog is well on his way to the Swiss frontier."

THE BULLY OF ZAMORA

by Thomas Topham

Author of "Grunty Shanghaies a Poet," "Too Much Magic," etc.

NO, NO, señor, do not be frightened. I am not angry when I twist my mustache so. I am thinking. Deep thoughts, señor, deep as the ocean, thoughts of days gone by when I was known as the Bull of Zamora.

A queer name, señor, gained from one of your joking *Americanos* who was a visitor in Mexico. He was beholding me as I amused myself with a band of idle fellows, inducing them to perform capers, and he cried out with a great admiration—

"*Viva,* the Bully of Zamora!"

Señor, the *Americano* word bully was new to me. I demanded that this visitor explain. This he did, and I was greatly pleased when I was told that it meant one who was as strong and as brave as a bull. From that occasion I became known far and wide as the Bull of Zamora, a name, my friend, well earned and lived up to. *El Toro de Zamora.* Is it not a sweet name, one to roll on the tongue and to make people admire?

Señor, I bow to your well expressed admiration. Margarita, but keep your hands out of the sugar bowl. Do you desire that I shall twist you in a knot and throw you to the dogs? Pardon the interruption, señor, but they are most provoking, these little ones. Pedro, but once more do you pinch the poor cat and you shall be thrown down the well, and I assure you, *diablillo,* that you shall rot there before I shall so much as offer you a hand of assistance.

Take Pedro outside, Enrique, and you may play with the old gun, but do not pull the trigger, as it may be loaded. *Sí,* play you are soldiers shooting the enemy. Again, señor, I beg of you patience and a thousand pardons, but these little ones must be cared for. They can not be allowed to run wild.

Ah yes, friend, I was, without doubt, the Bull of Zamora. I bore a charmed life. No one could draw a revolver so quickly as I. Now you see my hands are empty, señor. Ah, do not flinch. Was it not done quickly? And two guns in my hands, señor, in the twinkling of an eye. I assure you, I could have shot you before you had known there was even one gun in my hand. Could your *vaqueros* do it so well or so quickly?

Ha! Ha! You must not be frightened. It is true that I have shot many men, but always for a cause. I have no cause to shoot you, señor, at least not for the present.

See, the gun in my right hand bears twenty-two notches. No room to cut more and do justice to the poor fellows who could not draw their guns so quickly as I, so as you see, the other gun bears eight more notches.

Count the notches to be sure, *amigo.*

Twenty-two on one, eight on the other? Was I not correct? Are they not two beautiful weapons? Never could I part with these weapons. Money could not tempt me to sell them; there is not enough gold in all Mexico to purchase them. Would a man part with his hand for gold? I see that you agree with me, señor, and it pleases me to meet a man who has the same spirit as I.

I sigh, *amigo mio*, that so many brave men have seen fit to test the quickness with which I could draw a gun. Ramón, bring me my rifle. I shall show the señor its deadly record in the wars. You do not care to see? You shudder? It is a noble record, señor. *Bing! Bang!* Two notches. *Blam!* Another. And so it goes.

Andrés, if you so much as touch that little one, I shall cut your throat. I assure you, Andrés, that a child with his throat cut is not a pretty sight. He bleeds and squawks. Many a one have I seen so treated. Pardon me again, señor, but children are provoking. They will tease.

Reformed? I, Alfonso Hernandez the Bull of Zamora, reformed? I do not gain your meaning, señor; at least such is my hope. Many men have died for uttering less significant words to me than those, I give you my assurance. No, señor, I shall not shoot you, nor even demand an apology. You are ignorant, I see, of my great reputation. I can not shoot a man in cold blood.

Do not prostrate yourself, *amigo*. I accept your apology in the spirit in which it is offered.

The children? Ah yes, it is a collection of *niños* of which any man might well be proud. There is Margarita, two; and Pedro, who is five; and Ramón, a charming little fellow of seven; and Enrique, sturdy, gallant, of somewhat over seven; and José, small but smart, and only ten; and Adolfo, also ten, named for the gallant Adolfo de la Huerta; and Francisco, eleven, also named for a gallant soldier of ill-fated memory; and Tomás, only four, but a bright child; and Modesta, quiet but deep, and six years of age; and Andrés, of age nine but large for his years; and last is Juanita. There must always be a Juanita, señor. A perfect little mother is Juanita, and only thirteen.

I sigh to think that I, a man of forty years, am a trifle too old to wed her when she comes into the full bloom of womanhood in another year or two.

What? You thought they were mine? That I was the father of this brood of eleven little nuisances who run about and raise ——, as you *Americanos* say? Señor, in all seriousness, I should put a bullet through your heart. Of a certainty I am caring for these children tenderly, but that does not signify that I am their father.

Adolfo, one more slam of that door means that you die the death of a traitor, tied to a post and riddled with bullets. Take José outside and play that you are whipping a Yaqui to death. But do not use one of the other children for the Yaqui, otherwise I shall cut off your ears as the ears of your father before you should have been amputated. *Sí, niño*, a post will do very well for the Indian.

You are very patient, señor, but as you see I must provide innocent amusement for my little charges.

How did I acquire these *niños?* Ah, friend, how only as the Bull of Zamora? They came to me through my prowess. I see plainly that you have never heard of my exploits. It is a story of blood and shootings and great uproars, señor, and I, a modest man, should never tell it.

Señor, do not, I implore you, depart so hastily. If you would but regard me as another person, not Alfonso Hernandez *El Toro de Zamora*, I should be pleased to tell you the story. Only thus would I deign to relate to you these thrilling occurrences. You are to regard me merely as the narrator, not the actor.

IT BEGAN, señor, with my famous encounter with Anatolio Ortega. He was a very evil man, my friend, very evil; a man who cared not for his family, who drank up the money that should have gone to the purchase of quantities of *frijoles*.

It is sad, and somewhat strange señor, that on this particular night, I was in a most jovial humor. I caroled, I sang blithely as I entered the Cantina de Reposo, for the day had gone well with me. On my bare word to two men of whom I thoroughly disapproved, they had disappeared from Zamora, showing, señor, that my reputation was well established. I assure you, they knew what was good for them, and realizing that I was not well disposed

toward them, saved me the trouble of cutting two more notches on my already overcrowded gun handle.

So it was, that happy at heart, at peace with all the world, a song on my lips, cheer in my bosom and a smile for each and every one, I entered the Cantina de Reposo.

A gay crowd was in the *cantina*, for the *Americano* railroad contractor had paid off that day for much work. It delights me to see men enjoy themselves. So it was, as I entered, I very pleasantly invited all of those who were present to partake of refreshment with me, and insisted that the *cantinero* be the host. What fairer, *amigo*, than that this *cantinero*, whom I could have ruined in a moment by withholding my own patronage, should start my evening's pleasures by giving every one a free sip of *vino*?

I elbowed my way into the crowd. No, señor, not exactly elbowed, for the men, knowing my reputation, slunk back except this Anatolio Ortega. He scowled and thrust me aside. I should have shot him there, dead in his tracks, but I was withal so happy and indolent and carefree that I did not care to unclasp my knife and cut another notch.

One must always cut the notch at once, señor, otherwise he soon forgets, especially if the evening be long and full of events. As I say, this Anatolio Ortega refused to give way to me.

Moved by a sudden whim to bring laughter into this somber man's face and provide innocent amusement for the assemblage, I whipped out my six-times-shooting revolver and resorted to an old trick of mine that I learned from your *Americano* cinematograph. I bade this pig of an Ortega to dance. Merely a pleasantry, señor, to while away an idle hour. It is true that I fired a few shots into the floor, but with no intention of hitting him. I would maim no man for sport, señor.

This Ortega, as the shots spattered at his feet, did a few grotesque steps, a clumsy fandango, and I laughed aloud, bidding the rest of the assemblage to join in my mirth. This they did, as they beheld that my second gun was bearing upon them. The laughter rang loud and true, *amigo*. It was a charming scene of hilarity, one to do the heart good, with the exception of this kill-joy Ortega.

Suddenly my sharp eyes detected that this Ortega, instead of entering into the spirit of the occasion, was secretly slipping his hand toward his hip pocket.

The villain! As we were all enjoying the little joke, in true fashion of the West as your cinematographs so faithfully depict, this disgruntled individual was planning to murder me in cold blood!

Still smiling, for, señor, I always smile in the face of danger and death, I placed my gun behind his right ear, a most favorable place, *amigo mio*, and one that kills quickly and painlessly. Yes, señor, this is the very revolver. The crowd in the *cantina* stood breathless, awaiting the roar of the shot, the falling of the body of the worthless Ortega.

Juanita, little mother, thou art allowing the *niños* too much liberty. It would ill become me to take the club to thee before the honorable *caballero*. Tweak their ears till they scream with agony and begone from my sight!

My excuses are many, señor, for the behavior of the *niños*. With so many, it is hard to maintain the proper discipline. I assure you, but for your presence, they should all be beaten well.

Ah, yes, I was at the point where the unfortunate Ortega would, in another moment, sink lifeless to the floor, a mishap, as you can plainly see, brought on by his own stubbornness.

But suddenly this victim of his own base nature, perceiving that I had fathomed his purpose of killing me and feeling the gun at his ear, uttered a yell that was blood-curdling. Even I, señor, accustomed as I am to scenes of horror, was startled by this scream. And then the base fellow, without warning, struck me with a suddenness.

Sí, he whirled and hit me a powerful blow in the eye that sent me staggering backward. Of a certainty, had I not with great presence of mind, dropped one of my guns to wipe my eye from which the blood was now gushing, I should have shot the fellow Ortega, should have made him pay the penalty for his rashness and ingratitude.

With a mad leap my antagonist dashed into the crowd and away as if ten devils were pursuing him. It was thoughtless of him, señor, to dash so crazily into a crowd of men, for how could he know that I would not shoot into this crowd and kill many men? I shudder when I think of what might have happened, of innocent blood that might be on my hands.

No, señor, I was not seriously injured. How could a feeble man like this Ortega injure one so strong and powerful as I? I recovered quickly and laughed long and loud at the comical figure that Ortega made as he scurried away, and I bade others laugh also, which they did.

Quickly I cut a notch on my gun, for Ortega had plainly forfeited his life. Could I not have killed him, señor, simply by pressing the trigger when I had the revolver at his head? Surely, under those circumstances, the gun could not be cheated of its notch, because I had shown generosity to a helpless foe.

Again I invited the gay assemblage to partake of the *vino* that the *cantinero* was now in haste to set forth. I offered to pay him for his hospitality, but he waved aside the money. A noble man, the *cantinero*, and generous to a fault. It would be well, señor, were there more men of his caliber in the world.

I dismissed the miserable Ortega from my mind. No, señor, the *jefe politico*, when he spread the report that Ortega never owned a gun and consequently could not have been reaching for a weapon, was a liar; he lied, he knew he lied, the truth was not in him, and had he not been an official I should have hurled the lie back in his teeth.

I myself saw this Ortega slip his hand toward his pocket, and why, I ask you, would a man be doing that if he had not base murder in his mind?

Ramón, a *caballero* never expectorates on the floor. Your screaming and kicking will not avail. Five quick cuts of the whip on your bare legs, *niño*. See, it is quickly over and your lesson is learned. You laugh, señor, at the lightness of the taps I bestowed on the child, but you can see that he thinks he has been fearfully chastised. I could not have made him howl any the louder had I struck with all my great might. Can your excellency ever forgive me for the manner in which the *niños* behave? Of a certainty I am humiliated into the dust.

BUT, as I was saying, we of this gay assemblage were raising our glasses to drink to my health, when a terrible screaming was set up at the door, and in dashed a woman, disheveled and very unpleasant to look upon, dragging one child by the hand and carrying another.

"Murderer! Assassin!" she shouted at me, who had only acted to save my own life.

"Murderer?" I said sternly. "Beware, woman, that you do not say more than you can swallow with an ease. I may be tempted to choke your words back in your throat."

"Worse than murderer," this vixen stormed. "You have frightened my noble husband away. He rushed into our little home, grasped a small sack of coin that I had saved and, telling me that you intended to murder him, a peaceful man, he dashed away, leaving two innocent and helpless children fatherless."

"This noble husband of yours," I told her, "struck me in the eye," and I pointed to my eye that was now fast closed.

"Ah, the brave man," she shrieked. "But you have driven him away, never to return."

She screamed as women will, without fully understanding the reasons why men clash in battles to the death.

Amigo, I was abashed, as I always am in the presence of women. She was very unfair, but I could not explain. I am a *caballero*. But seldom have I struck a woman, and then only when pushed to the extremity of saving my own life or when driven to extreme rage by their viperish tongues. A rule of mine also, señor, is never to strike a woman with a child in her arms. So you can see, my friend, that I was helpless, completely helpless, for I would not violate my rules of conduct even if death threatened.

"You, the murderer, shall take these children and care for them," cried the woman and, thrusting the smallest into my arms, she hurled the second at me and departed, howling wildly.

What could I do, señor? I could not drop the helpless infant to the floor. I stood there holding this *niña* in one hand, my great six-shooting gun in the other. *Sí*, señor, for an instant I was tempted to turn the gun on the infant, but only for a moment. The little vixen, Margarita, looked at me and said—

"Coo."

So, in the twinkling of an eye, had I acquired two *niños*, my friend, two small children of which I had no earthly use. I, Alfonso Hernandez, the Bull of Zamora, a

man who had sworn never to have a family, who hated women, had, without effort, begun the acquiring of a family.

The gay scene of hilarity, begun in song and revelry, had changed in the flick of a bull's tail to a scene of somber realism.

"*Papá,*" said a mocking voice in the crowd of rude fellows, and a hoarse laugh followed.

I assure you, *amigo*, had I been able to pick out that base buffoon, I should have slain him without mercy; yes, though the saints had been pleading for his life. But I could not slay all of the men gathered there, for others had joined us. I contented myself with a lowering look from which they all shrank.

I was not to be abashed, however. I turned about and picking up my glass of *vino* I raised it aloft.

"Caballeros," I cried, "I shall not shirk my duty. Drink to the health of——"

I could not think of a name.

"Margarita," said one of the men.

"Margarita and José," I said, supplying a name for the other child, for I could see it was a boy.

Dashing down my liquor, I stalked forth, determined to find the Señora Ortega and restore to her the two children. My search was vain. She had departed, none knew where, but it was believed far to the south with one Juan Garrido, who had been hanging about, but unwilling to take her so long as she had the two children. Such, señor, was the base manner in which I was betrayed by a woman.

I took the two innocent orphans to my rather small place of abode, a hut down by the railroad, where I obtained rent free, for who, señor, would pay rent when a home, sufficient in every way, may be obtained for the asking in old cars?

By a little excursion I obtained a goat, for the Rancho Sanchez had many goats and could not miss one poor animal. I ask you, was it not imperative that Margarita, then very young, should have milk? One should not stand on ceremony, *amigo*, where the very life of an infant is endangered, and I was unfortunately very short of funds.

Pardon, señor, a digression. Francisco, stand there and look at me. Do you not know, *muchacho*, that I, Alfonso Hernandez, your legal guardian, have killed many, many men? You tremble? It is well that you should. Would you relish having me chop off your toes one by one and feed them to the cat? Ah, you whimper! It is well. Do you not know that it is an unbecoming act to slash the coat of the *caballero* with the butcher knife? Begone, *pronto*, or the cat shall feed well tonight and not on mice that she catches.

Do not grieve, señor, over the coat. It is but a trifle, a simple cut no longer than my finger, and Juanita shall sew it together as good as new. A wonderful little mother, señor. I am happy that you shall see her handiwork. You are very gracious, señor, with your thanks.

The other *niños?* Well, *amigo*, the story of how I acquired the next three is not a pretty one. It is filled with stark tragedy and blood and intrigue. *Sí*, three at once came to me, Pedro, Ramón and Juanita.

I was caring for little Margarita and José as best I could. José attended his little sister very tenderly, and also milked the goat. I still had much leisure, I was still carefree to an extent, and gay. Many a time, my friend, did I carry out your great *Americano* joke of making men dance to the tune of a popping gun. Life was easy and pleasant and I was much feared.

Many a time have I seen people of the town pointing me out to visitors and whispering the tale of the notches that I carried on my guns. Occasionally I varied this joke that your cinematograph taught me. I would make them stand on their heads on chairs while the crowd applauded. Once I shot a poor fellow in the foot when he refused to take off his shoes and drink by holding the glass in his toes.

See the notch, señor, on the revolver? No, señor, the man whom I shot in the foot did not die, but he might well have. It is very dangerous to be shot in the foot. Did not Achilles die from the same cause, señor? Of a certainty, this man whom I shot when he defied me, the Bull of Zamora, well deserved a notch among the other poor fellows.

IT WAS on an evening that I was feeling very miserable, *amigo*, when I accumulated Pedro, Ramón and Juanita. I had dropped into the Cantina de Reposo to cheer my drooping spirits, and I was invited into a game of cards. I accepted the invitation. Despite my miserable feelings and my gloomy forebodings,

I won. Ah, if my three companions at the table but had possessed a plentiful supply of money, señor, I should this day be rolling in wealth. I won their money, a matter of twenty pesos.

"Your star is shining brightly tonight," said Manuel Flores, a miserable little fellow whose wife had only departed this life a few weeks before. Therefore he was free again to indulge in the pleasures of men.

I sneered, toying the pesos in my hand.

"What have you to stake against this gold?" I asked.

"Nothing," said this Flores. "I have nothing but three hungry and motherless children."

This touched my heart. I flung him a peso.

"Feed your *niños*," I bade him, for I could not bear the thought of the little ones suffering.

The miserable man flung the coin back on the table.

"One peso," he declared with a callousness, "would not fill the belly of the smallest. I shall stake this coin. They go hungry or feed well."

In a flash my two guns covered the coward.

"You shall feed them so many *frijoles* as it will purchase," I informed him with a coldness, "otherwise you die."

He laughed again, a laugh that sent the hot blood of anger to my cheeks. Why I did not riddle him with bullets I know not. I had killed before for less. He made no move to draw a gun, the coward, and fight man to man.

Can you realize the insult that I devised for this man? I drew out my knife and before his very eyes cut a notch on my gun.

"For you," I said. "A dead one. I could have killed you with an ease, but I shall not. I spare your life."

Could one heap a greater insult on another? I ask you, señor, if my contempt was not supreme?

But this pig of a Flores was of a certainty playing with death on that night. Ungrateful to me, who had spared his life once, he yet continued to attempt to irritate me. He looked me in the eye, I, who had just grossly insulted him. He spoke.

"I have a wonder," said this monstrous apology for a man, "if you are the brave, desperate man of your reputation or one who has reputation only?"

Think of it, señor. Questioning my bravery. I, who who had notch after notch on my guns. I, Alfonso Hernandez, whose very word sent men trembling from my presence. I, *El Toro de Zamora*, who dared death in a thousand forms, who always carried my life in my hands, ready to slay or be slain. I saw red, *amigo*. In a trice my guns were in my hands again, my fingers trembling on the triggers.

"Ah-h-h," said this villainous Flores, "you would shoot an unarmed man, the father of three motherless children."

The mention of these children calmed me somewhat. It is my one weakness, señor. Manuel Flores saw my hesitation. He spoke again—

"Bold and desperate as you are, El Toro de Zamora, you dare not face me in a hazard of chance I shall propose."

"What is this hazard?" I asked, my blood hot, ready to dare anything that he should suggest, for, *amigo*, I am a rash man.

"You have won much money this night," said this man who had cast aspersions on me, "but you dare not wager your gains against all that I have. One twirl of the cards."

"All that you have? Show me, braggart, what it is you would wager against all this gold," I demanded, and jingled the pesos in my hand tauntingly.

"I have nothing here," said this Flores. "I stake against your pesos all that I have in my house. I propose that we each draw five cards from the deck. If I have the highest hand, *Americano* style of poker, I take your pesos. If you have the highest hand, you take all in my home. It is a poor house, but all that is therein is mine. It shall all be yours, the machine that talks, the rifle, all."

Of a truth, a strange proposal, señor, a proposal from a desperate man. But what could I do? I thought quickly of adding another notch on my gun and so settling this matter, but I rejected it when I considered the braggart's children. They would, of a certainty, be fatherless and motherless. The insolent fellow laughed as I hesitated, considering his most unusual challenge.

"Ah-h-h," he sneered. "A brave fellow in truth."

My anger flared.

"Deal the cards at once and decide this

affair," I ordered him sternly, dropping my hand to my pistol menacingly.

I assure you, señor, a moment of hesitation on his part then would have been his death warrant.

This Flores snatched the cards from the table. I looked about to see the effect of my words. Many others had joined the crowd about the table to see this most unusual game. I swept my eyes back to Flores. He dealt the two hands. One by one I picked up the cards. First there was an ace; then a nine; again an ace; again an ace; and last another nine.

Oh, oh, oh, Modesta *mia*, did you bump your head? José struck you? The villain! See, little dove, I kiss the bump with a graciousness. *Bueno*, it is well. Carry the word, *muchacha*, to that butcher of a boy, that one more bump, and I, the Bull of Zamora, will bellow at his heels. Will he not look humorous and be frightened with me chasing him?

Is she not an excellent child, señor, to go away laughing after such a terrible bump? Ah, yes, the cards.

I laid down my cards with a light hand. My opponent flung his down. For an instant I thought that I had received the lowest hand. We crowded to see. He had three fours and two fives!

Loud I laughed and long. Manuel Flores spread his hands, hunched his shoulders, the picture of misery.

"The braggart señor wins," he said with a bitterness, and slunk away, to be lost forever from my sight.

No, señor, I did not hold his words against him. I had no intention of killing him. Already he was notched on my gun. What benefit to waste a bullet on him.

Still laughing, for I was much pleased with myself, I picked up the cards which had served me so well. Señor, it then struck me that these cards were much cleaner than the cards with which we had been playing. In a fever of excitement I picked up the deck and counted the cards. It was a complete deck without the two hands that Manuel Flores had dealt himself and me. The cheat had taken these hands from his sleeve, I divined at once.

My rage knew absolutely no bounds. I swore terrifying oaths; I appalled every man there by threatening wholesale execution of them all; I solemnly took an oath to have the blood of Manuel Flores and, my guns in my hands, I started out to find him. I knew that some trick had been played upon me. What, I knew not.

I RUSHED from the *cantina*, as I say, and down to the miserable hovel of Manuel Flores. I pushed in the door. No, at first glance, there had been no trick. The machine for the talking was there, the rifle, a few chairs, but huddled together on a pallet in a corner were Pedro, Ramón and Juanita.

It was then that I perceived in a flash how I had been basely deceived. I had been allowed to win from this vile man everything in the house, which included these three helpless little ones. Their father was gone, never to return.

It was of no avail to rage, señor. I am a man of honor. I had pledged my word and a game of chance had placed these innocent ones in my keeping. I would not shirk. I could not leave them alone there for the night, to awaken hungry and wailing in the morning, so I awakened them, having made the unalterable decision that I would take them to my house. On the morrow I would remove the machine for the talking, the rifle and the chairs.

So, taking these little ones, I started my march toward my humble home, a march which led back past the Cantina de Reposo. It was very natural, señor, that I should step within to see, only, if the scoundrel, Manuel Flores, was there. I placed the children in a corner where they fell promptly to sleep. It was then that I told those who were present of Manuel Flores and his base desertion of his helpless *niños*.

My friends expressed themselves appropriately. Of a certainty, if Manuel Flores had been there, a number of men would have cut notches on their gun handles.

Having delivered myself of the most scorching denunciation of this Flores of which I was capable and, I assure you, señor, I am an able talker when sufficiently aroused, I started forth. But some one plucked me by the sleeve as I stepped out the door. It was the *cantinero*.

"Of a surety, Señor Hernandez, you are forgetting your children," said this *cantinero*.

Quickly I turned a gun at this *cantinero* who dared poke his mercenary nose into

my most intimate family affairs. Of a truth, due to the excitement and a very few sips of *vino*, I had completely forgotten these little ones as they slept in the corner. But the insinuation of the *cantinero* that I, in turn, was basely deserting my charges, aroused me to a fury, The *cantinero* could see the thought in my face, in my bloodshot eyes, that I intended to kill him without mercy. He paled.

"Pardon, señor, a hundred pardons," he appealed to me. "I was only suggesting that the señor have a bottle of *aguardiente* to take home with him in case there should be illness; perhaps one of the little ones may be taken suddenly ill."

Think of it, señor. The thoughtful man, knowing that I should have many to care for, had decided to aid me in every way possible. It is not often that a man meets one who is so thoughtful of others. This tenderness of the *cantinero* touched me deeply. It is true that he was virtually a dead man, for it was only by the flicker of an eyelid that I had not shot him to death when he grasped my sleeve. I told him so, and how happy I was that he continued to live.

"See," I said to him as I cut a notch on my gun, "I honor you thus. This means that you are numbered among the victims of Alfonso Hernandez. Your life was fairly forfeit because of your slowness in bringing forth your gun. You must practise. I shall be pleased to teach you."

"But I have no gun." he said to me.

Think of it, señor! A man without a gun! My scorn wast too deep for words, so, grasping the bottle of *aguardiente*, I awakened the children, Pedro, Ramón and Juanita, and stalked from the *cantina*.

And so it was, señor, that I acquired three more of my charges, making five in all.

Tomás, run outside and halt the exercise of the little ones. They will surely kill the dog if they keep him hanging in the tree by his tail. And tell them, Tomás, that unless they desist, I shall feel compelled to knock at least half of them in the head with the ax. They will not look well, Tomás, five of them stretched out dead with their heads caved in. See the scamp scurry. An excellent way, señor, to keep discipline. Threats of sudden death have a quieting effect on many persons.

And so, señor, I had five. I was willing to stop there, *amigo*, but Fate willed otherwise.

I sold the belongings of Manuel Flores, which I had fairly won, in order to buy food for the little ones. Affairs were getting desperate when I heard through the wife of a friend whose father's brother had just returned from Mexicali that the base deserter, Manuel Flores, was there laboring for the railroad and spending his money carousing.

My own affairs were in bad shape, señor. Six mouths to feed and little to feed them. What more natural than that I should devise the plan to slip silently into Mexicali and restore to Manuel Flores his brood of children?

They were his by all the laws of humanity, for, señor, one can not gamble away the lives and liberty of one's children. Of a certainty I was only acting the part of a worthy citizen when I did this noble deed.

I sold the last of my belongings for a few pesos and on a dark night, carrying little Margarita, and with the others following, I slipped out of Zamora and took the road to Mexicali.

Certainly, señor, I took my two trusty revolvers with me and Ramón carried the rifle.

We traveled but a short distance that night, for Margarita was heavy to carry and the other little ones wept bitterly from fatigue. So we camped in a pleasant place beside the road. The next day I expended my few remaining centavos for bread and a bottle of *vino*, which cheered us greatly, and we resumed our march. Toward evening the little ones were crying again for food and, señor, I had no money.

We were close to a miserable village. I was desperate. The cries of the little ones struck through my heart, so as evening approached I drew my two revolvers and lay beside the road. I let one man go by, for he looked as if prosperity had forgotten him, but another approached who, I judged, had money in his pocket.

With a bound I was in the road, my two guns in my hands, leveled.

"Behold!" I cried. "You are dealing with the Bull of Zamora. I have a hungry army to feed, my fine gentleman. But bat an eye and you are a dead man."

To such an extremity was I reduced, señor. No, *amigo*, you should not use the word "rob." It is an unpleasant word. But

could a strong man behold five little ones crying for food? Ah, no. Better to take a few pesos from one who needed them not, than to let children starve.

To my grief and anger this man had only a few centavos, showing, señor, that one can not always judge by appearances. However, I borrowed these, and sternly bade the man depart.

Many men, disappointed as I was, would have slain this man. I contented myself with cutting a notch on my gun. See, señor, there is the notch, standing for his life. But for his willingness to contribute what little he had to the feeding of these little ones in my custody, he should have died the death of a dog. The Bull of Zamora would have had no mercy upon him. He was very close to death, my friend, for I am quick on the trigger. None can shoot so quickly as I, and but few have slain so many as I.

My next problem was to expend this meager sum for food. It would not go far. I could not enter the miserable village, because undoubtedly the traveler whom I had stopped would spread the news.

AFTER it had got quite dark I bade the children keep still and not stray about and, slipping away, I reached a lonely house on the outskirts of the village. There was a light. I knocked boldly and a man came and opened the door.

I explained to him that I would purchase food. He laughed very unpleasantly. He sneered. He bade me search his house for food. He pointed to six little ones on a pallet. They had cried themselves to sleep for lack of food.

Señor, my gorge rose. I looked upon the faces of these *niños* and my heart grew sore. I swore that they should have food.

"Harken to me, *amigo*," I said to this miserable father of six hungry *niños*, "I am *El Toro de Zamora*. I shall get food for these little ones."

The miserable man shrank back afraid.

"So," he cried, "I have heard the story. Lopez Quijada met you today. You took a few centavos from him. He returned to the village and told of his adventure. He said that you had an army with you. The people of the town are shivering with fear of the Bull of Zamora."

It was then that I remembered, señor, that in truth I had mentioned an army to this man I had met in the road. I had said that I must have food for my hungry army, little thinking he would take it seriously. Truly, I meant my hungry army of children, señor. I do not lie, and would not have told this man a lie of having an army at my call.

But this story told by the miserable father of six hungry children stirred me to attempt a ruse. I could not enter the village. I had not enough money to purchase food for myself, my five *niños*, this father and his six *niños*. I spoke sternly.

"Begone!" I said to this man. "Enter the village and tell them that the Bull of Zamora will attack at once with his army. They have a bare ten minutes to evacuate the place."

Thus I hoped to obtain food for all.

I brought my two famous revolvers into play, señor. So suddenly did they appear that the man was dumfounded. He stood and looked at the weapons as if dazed.

"Begone, *pronto*," I ordered him. "I, the Bull of Zamora, will cut a notch on the handle of one of these guns with a suddenness if you do not carry out my orders."

With a quickness this man started to run, señor. He disappeared in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye. I amused myself by cutting a notch, for of a certainty if he had not obeyed my order he should have died in his tracks. I never temporized, *amigo*. I shot first, always, and considered the aspects of the affair afterward.

No, señor, he never came back. I expected him to return and report that the people were fleeing. He was, however, so badly frightened by the reputation of the Bull of Zamora that he considered only himself and kept on running. Señor, he may be still running. And so I acquired Enrique, Adolfo, Francisco, Tomás, Andrès and Modesta, six noble children, señor.

I watched the village but there was no excitement. I waited long for this man to return. As the night wore on and he did not come back, I went forth and fetched Margarita, José, Pedro, Ramón and Juanita to the hut.

The next morning I walked into the village. I did not tell them who I was, as, señor, there was then no need. I purchased as much food as I could and pledged my rifle to obtain more. And then, señor,

I obtained for myself a remunerative position on the railroad. It is very hard work, my friend, lifting the rails and digging with the pick, but, señor, I am strong, and the little ones must have food. Eleven of them eat, my goodness, señor, how they do eat!

Oh, señor, I am horrified at your offer to purchase these two historic revolvers with their notches of tragedy. Did you not hear me say that I shall never part with them? Thirty pesos, señor, is far too little for the one with the twenty-two notches. Double that sum would not be too much. Yes, señor, I part with it with the deepest regret and I assure you it is a bargain at thirty-five pesos.

And this other one? Why, señor, your generosity is charming. Twenty pesos is sufficient. I sell only, señor, because this money will go far in feeding so many little mouths. And a peso for each of the little ones. You have done much, señor, to cement the friendship of two great republics.

Are they not a handsome pair of revolvers, *amigo*, and they have stood me well in many a bloody encounter. May I count the notches carefully Twenty-two on one, eight on the other.

Such a question, my friend. Why should I count them? Why, of a certainty, I must start my record of another pair of revolvers where I leave off on these. I must cut the same number of notches on the new guns I shall purchase, for, *amigo*, a man must have guns. Twenty-two on one, eight on the other. Poor fellows. It is a noble record.

SEÑOR, I beg of you do not whisper it about that I am *El Toro de Zamora*, for then, señor, it would mean I should have to add many, many more notches on my new guns. And I have slain far too many already, I assure you.

A PUBLIC BENEFACTOR

***by* J. D. Newsom**

BECAUSE of its geographical isolation the island of New Caledonia was almost devoid of animal life before it was colonized by the white man. It harbored a few indigenous birds, the cagou for instance, some reptiles, lizards and water snakes, but only one species of mammal—rats, and even these were not very prolific.

The colonists found the island rather barren and stocked it with cattle, horses and a few sheep, which gave the valleys a more prosperous appearance—a much more prosperous appearance.

Sportsmen, however, found life very tame once the Kanakas ceased to resent the presence of aliens and one high official with a taste for game imported at great expense a couple of deer, which he turned loose in the hills. Within a few years there was excellent hunting to be found in some of the more remote districts, which could only be reached by difficult trails.

The high official with a taste for game was called a public benefactor and decorated. Functions were held in his honor at Government Home.

And a few more years went by. After a period of coy seclusion the deer left their mountain fastnesses and slowly spread from end to end of the island. They came in herds of several hundreds and were more destructive than locusts. At night they ran amuck through coffee plantations and yam fields, they jumped the highest fences and cropped the grass in the fattening paddocks. Kanaka children, posted in the field by their parents lost many valuable sleeping hours while they beat upon iron pots and shouted loudly to ward of the all-devouring deer. Armed guards shot them down at the slightest provocation and sportsmen had the time of their lives without seeming to have any effect whatsoever on the high birth rate.

Today New Caledonia is overrun by the pests and the high official is no longer called a public benefactor. But he has long since gone home and wears a rosette in his buttonhole to show that he has not lived in vain.

DADE McCRACKIN was ignorant as to the origin of his race. Some things gave him great pleasure; the bark of a gun pleased him as it would have a fourteen-year-old boy; to be uppermost in a rough-and-tumble scramble, to stick by his kin, such matters were of consequence to him; but he would not have given a snap of his fingers to have heard why he, a "Florida Cracker," and his enemy, Cartwright, a self-accepted "foreigner," were different.

England had sent his ancestors to penal servitude in the Colonies. A family at a time, they had either broken loose or worked out from under their stigma, and had come cracking their long ox whips, some north to the Kentucky and Ozark hills, others southward to Georgia and Florida, in a restless searching for new land.

Intermarriage became a custom among them; clannish instinct made of them a race apart; and not infrequently feuds destroyed the whole seed of a branch.

All these things were dormant in the mind of Dade McCrackin—foremost was his hatred of Cartwright of Webb County, of every "foreigner" in Florida. He would have time to nurse his hatred. If hard pressed, he could make his way to the West Coast. Flight left a bitter taste in his mouth. Even in the "Hunger Land" he could not get away from that.

A year of sun fire usually suffices the forest to redeem itself from ravage. It must have been an infernal flame of Dante's that named the barren, glade-bordering strip which the Indians avoid. The decadent Seminole clans brood over many legends and starved ghosts walk the charred stumps and naked brush of the Hunger Land.

Starved ghosts are rife in the Hunger Land of the mind. Grim, unpitying things they came and stared at the stooped shoulders of the outlaw, McCrackin, where he crouched, nursing his rifle with torn fingers, in a soot-rooted clump of straggly palmetto.

They were hungrier than the knotted, white gullets of winter-frozen pickerel. They were more ravenous than mink, gnawing at the steely crystal of ice for imprisoned minnows. Their hunger was one that could wait like that of the toothless outcast of some far-northern tribe, dreaming of tick-eared, plague-ridden hares as a gormand dreams of banquets, staving off the death of summer for the death winter has to give.

They were hungry as the revenge the man glutted himself on, and infinitely more so than the searing pain that sat on his belly.

He had almost forgotten the wound in his side. Hess—that had been Hess! But Hess was lying in Dade McCrackin's yard, the blood welling from his hairy chest. Hess was quite dead; Dade McCrackin was sure of that—and Belden, and Agnew, too.

There was a drab flatness in being a Webb County McCrackin of the first water. All

winds that blew your way were yours; Webb County attributed all her bad reckonings to you. In fact they had lately become most insultingly resigned about doing so.

Did they know how it felt to be a McCrackin with your anger an ember to blow on and fitfully keep alive in the gray ash of your blood? Were they bearing the inert, dissolute seed of men who had overborne the primal savagery of the country only to have it cast a pall of shiftlessness upon their children?

No, they were rank newcomers to this coastland of mangrove, sandy spruce ridge and piney woods; they could not even be gentlemanly in conceding you the pale aftermath of a killing. To them a McCrackin was a fire eater born, a handy man with knives, and that settled it.

All had happened with incredible swiftness; it had been like the sharp slapping of whip-ray wings upon the water, that shooting, and in the stillness that had followed Dade McCrackin was beginning to wonder at his being fugitive. Two days out, with never a stop till now, he huddled in the underbrush that had grown up between the black, burnt aisles of pine.

Silent, he waited for the dawn.

His lean face ceased twitching and settled grimly into half a smile. There were no dogs; no one was following; he need not have come so far.

In the false light he made a cigaret, counting his knuckles as he rolled it: The first for Cartwright; Hess, Joe Belden and Tutt Agnew were dead fingers.

Day came slanting down through the bleak flatwoods, gray pallor and rosy flush, swiftly semi-tropic. Great blue herons sailed in lazy single file over the black pine tops to their early morning fishing.

Ahead, even as these were flying, was the Elysium he had heard of; were the swamps, the 'glades and the great flats where the barefoot spoor of wandering Seminole met that of bearded white man.

It was no land for a McCrackin of the coast country, who shot cat-squirrels, ran 'coon and trailed the deer between tending his father's still and roustabouting at hilariously awkward Cracker breakdowns; but there were men of the breed of this McCrackin there.

For all his security in the absolute silence of the scene, he gave way to the caution in him before he ate of the corn pone secreted in his shirt, rising and peering to see if he was alone. Satisfied that he was, he ate, cursed fervently for whisky to wash the pone down, lighted his cigaret, bathed his wound, shouldered his rifle and padded off to the south and the west.

A jo-ree bird made a great racket in the dry leaves under a turkey-berry bush.

THE searching parties were drifting back into the dry, sandy yard of the clearing. There was not one in the crowd but had searched half-heartedly. They feared to hunt a man in that bush. McCrackin knew the "why" of his rifle. The dogs sensed the spirit, regardless of how they strained at their leashes.

Cartwright was on the scene now, busily helping out with the inquest; he had not been there during the shooting.

His voice was loud; he was a large man, fleshy, bull-necked, and authoritative, in all these things affording a sharp contrast to the gangling, soft-drawling McCrackin. He made a great show of ordering off the crowd of curious that had gathered and still poured in to see the remains of the house—men had fired it in the night, quite by accident.

He was not overanxious that they should go, the pomposity of it all appealed to him. In the public eye like this a few more times and he could run for legislature.

Two of his deputies, Belden and Agnew, best men both of them, were dead. Hess was well-nigh gone; the old women were already counting the hours he had yet to live. Well, it looked as if he'd settled with Old Man McCrackin's threatenin' to get nasty with him; the old man dead and all that.

The still—they'd known about that long ago—intended to use it to keep the old man's mouth shut. His mouth hadn't kept shut, so now they were relying on it as evidence for causing the mix-up.

Cartwright and his deputies were oily enough on the liquor question as it was. It was ironical that they sought that excuse. They had railroaded Tod McCrackin some time ago and pulled themselves out of a mighty bad deal. That was what Old Man McCrackin had got mad about. You see, Tod had smuggled a letter to him before the road gang had sweated him out.

Queer what a false move they had made, the deputies, in supposing the old native to be alone. Cartwright had been off the

scene, ostensibly swearing in more men. Belden had stalked into the yard, closely followed by the two others.

While they waited, making up their minds as to what course to follow under the dip roots of the family rubber tree, McCrackin's dog had rushed out from under the cabin and had charged at them, cur fashion, without barking. The idea came to Agnew; he leaned over and whispered it to Belden.

"Shoot when the old varmint comes to the door," meanwhile emptying his rifle at the dog to bring out McCrackin.

Belden, at ready, waited. Slowly, very carefully, he shot Dade McCrackin's father through the center of the forehead.

There might be others. Hess called out to suppositious reenforcements in the rear as he ran forward with the rest toward the doorstep, loading his gun as he ran. The ruse failed to work this time. Belden and Tutt Agnew took a slug apiece from Dade's rifle before they had gone five feet.

Strangely enough Hess, who had emptied his gun at the dog and was now forced to reload, was the only one of the three to exchange shots with the murdered man's son. At the sound of the rifles he had gained the shelter of a crude well, no shelter at all in the viewpoint of the man who held the cabin. In his eagerness to avenge and be done with snipe shooting, Dade had exposed himself. It was Hess who gave him the wound in the side.

Still, it was Hess who had lain there with the bubble on his chest when Dade McCrackin had fled, worming his way through the mangrove of the brackish creek bottom and beginning his long flight.

Hess was not quite gone when Cartwright appeared, suave even in his reversal.

He would rather it had been a fairer trade. The old man dead; Dade in hiding; that was well enough. He was not at all worried over whispered talk of Dade's "getting his revenge."

It was all politics with Cartwright. With this behind him to point at and none of Old Man McCrackin's blabbed secrets, he was cocksure he'd carry the district.

FOR three long years the horror of being alone dwelt with Dade McCrackin. Surreptitiously, to rid himself of his hides, he had seen other men. They had been almost like himself, long-boned fur traders, for the most part with a reason for being fur traders.

Hungrily, he had tried to glean news from them. Either they had none or they were not anxious to bide too long with this black-jawed staring of his. Men had been shot for their outfits in those parts.

At night he realized most of all the decadence that was his to swallow. Sitting, drinking trade gin on the hummock where he had built his palm lean-to, it came to him in its full vividness. Where his shirt covered his skin he was gray; he felt that his blood would run gray were that skin torn; there was a vision in him that this eternal searing sun had drawn all wiry fiber from his ancestry and left him to bear ashes of their grayness.

It was then he would devise schemes of torture for Cartwright.

By day, plodding through the sawgrass and the flats, he felt the bitter slackness of his failure to revenge the subtlety of the man. There would have been humor in this tending of otter traps, but for those two things. It was a daily game of chess. Who saw the other man first, he hid. Sometimes they were Seminoles; sometimes other gaunter men.

But always there were the nights with the gin and the mad throwing of flame-bursting palm leaves upon the fire.

SO THAT was why "One-Eye" Blake, the cook on the logy brown catfish boat, fell backward, choking and grabbing for his gun at the sight of the apparition that had climbed out of the greasy black water on to the bow of the boat to sit there staring at him.

"Y'all kain put that 'ar gun daown," said Dade McCrackin, half-dead from wading and swimming the shallow quarter mile of Okeechobee.

"Gawsh burn mah pahlor slippahs!" whistled One-Eye, glaring at Dade with his good orb. "You h'aint so big, h'it's that 'ar beard o'yourn!"

Dade grinned. In half an hour and six drinks he had it all out with One-Eye to run lines that winter.

"Eke'l shares," said the squint-eyed, old lake pirate, pocketing one of the wet bills McCrackin had exchanged ten otter hides for at Canal Point. Brightening, he helped his snaggle teeth to another swig.

"Eke'l shares all roun', so bless me, One-Eye Blake, I swear!"

Half asleep on the fish-reeking floor, Dade heard One-Eye's three comrades in villainy fumble with the painter of their skiff as they came aboard. They were respectively, three, four and five sheets in the wind, and immediately took on an argumentative turn as to the new man.

"Shares is lean." This was a little rat-eyed man in oily canvas, biting his fingers and looking to and away from One-Eye. "Shares is lean a'ready yet, One-Eye!"

One-Eye Blake glowered at the man with his good eye. He was very old in the tricks of sticking top dog. Even in a party of four there must be some man to stand foremost. And One-Eyed intended to remain that man. He growled at the diminutive Jib Smith in the fashion that one small boy growls at a smaller.

"I've done took a likin' to him, boil your hide! Herea'rter, him an' me an' you, we eats outen the same saucepan, that we does!"

There had always been fair play between these four. Hard work at the lines, fair split of bottles; but now they were about to break up. Harry, he held the heads; Bill Morse, a black-browed oldster, flayed; and Jib Smith was gut-man. One-Eye had been cook outside the line work that all took part in.

Jib muttered unintelligibly.

All would have been well; Jib would have gone to sleep; Dade would have become additional line man in the morning; and One-Eye would still have been cook, had he not drawn his clenched fists from his pockets and shaken them toward the mutterer.

The twenty-dollar bill was dry from the heat of the stove in the cabin. Serenely it floated, now showing orange, now green, to fall at the feet of the three. They stared at it vacantly, then comprehensibly, and at length all turned to stare at One-Eye.

Jib spoke the pass word very slowly, holding the bill tenderly between his fingers while he spoke.

"Eke'l shares all roun', One-Eye. Ah reckon this was how-come lean shares nevah bothahed you."

He spoke dryly. What was theirs had always been theirs four ways.

Still the old idea of saving himself stuck with One-Eye. He would retreat, but with his face on.

"Ah'm quittin'!"

He charged for his treasure, snatching and pocketing it.

It was all part of the day's work with Bill Morse. He'd seen enough partnerships break up on the muddy old lake. In no time at all he got out the chest and passed One-Eye his due and proper share.

"Naow, you an' yoah little partner git!"

Dade had listened to the whole of it, and stumbled into the skiff behind One-Eye. Harry and Bill Morse rowed them in.

"'AT'S the talk!" spoke One-Eye, spitting glumly.

They had been stranded ashore two weeks now.

"An' all talk, too!"

McCrackin was wary of trusting men, and had developed a keen insight into the exaggerated nature of One-Eye.

Blake checked his protest.

"Hit's jest a chancet, Dade; iffen we don't, t'others will!"

One-Eye Blake's whiskers were salty. He would be seeing chances when they were white.

"We'll shore get run off!"

"What if we do?" Old One-Eye Blake scored this time. "Reckon you an' me, Mac, we c'n get off 'n' on fast es most! An' they's money to be made, gettin' off 'n' on; big money! No taxin'! No payin'! Nothin'!

"State land it is, Mac. Muck black as yer hat; custard apple land, too, some un it. Your stake top o'mine, we'll cl'ar out enough this year t' make we'uns rich, we will that. Me, Mac, next y'ar it's me fer G'aray!"

DADE McCRACKIN was behind the plow, stealing a crop from State land. His beard had not been cut since he had fled. Curly black, sleek with sweat, it rolled under his lean jaws.

He followed the old nag he had bought with his otter skins down long black rows between snaky piles of custard apple roots. The ground was almost ready to seed again. One-Eye had left after the first crop—hied off to Georgia with his money and McCrackin's, too. It had been a profitable venture for One-Eye.

He was beginning to love this land of black earth that bore four crops. It was driving the ashen bitterness from his mouth.

Already the 'coons ran up and down the ditches he had dug; kildeer and plover teetered over the fresh-plowed earth.

The bitterness came to be that it was not his land. He had cleared it, toiling in the sun; an unusual thing for spawn of the old McCrackins to be doing.

State land, it seemed, was political plum-fruit.

He had watched his neighbors in the process of being thrown out, the ground they worked having been deeded. Some of it was being colonized by hard-working Swedes from Wisconsin. Eventually he, too, would be forced to move. Where would he go?

It was then that the old grayness came, Cartwright and the death of his father.

It was not his land he realized; but he did not feel that he was thieving. He felt that he was not as these vagrant catfish fishermen that came but to go. The land seemed part and parcel of him. It was good to feel he could lay his head down. He wondered vaguely what he would do when it came his turn to be ousted.

It was the second month of the second year. Rumor had passed him by and he was caught unawares, seeding his beans again in the field where the custard apple roots were rotting.

He turned white under his beard and burn as he walked toward the three men. Two of them he knew as "locaters." The third, a fat, paunchy individual with affected broad hat and sleek Palm Beach fittings, stirred his blood to an old awakening.

His mind in a foment of twisted visions, Dade McCrackin thought of his beard and of the change this man had wrought over his body. He would take the chance of recognition.

Slowly he walked to meet him, his chew dripping in a thick, sirupy stream over his beard and on to the blue of his shirt.

"Well, my man—" this was Cartwright, diplomatic even in ousting a squatter from land he had wheedled from the State, squatters sometimes vote—"sorry, but you must've missed your location."

The locaters went through the process of checking up on imaginary lines and then nodded their heads to corroborate.

Dade became even more crafty, reassured now that it was plain Cartwright failed to recognize him. The foment in his mind had formed its scheme. His beard hid the workings of his face. His mouth opened 'gawpishly and gave an excellent imitation of a squatter caught with the goods.

"Wal! Do say!"

The tobacco juice had quit dribbling down his beard. Now he must get the man alone.

He grinned—it passed for a grin at least. Try his best, all he could do was let fall his lower jaw.

"You've done a mighty lot of work here, my man!"

This was Cartwright again. The heat ran beads down his loose jowls.

McCrakin's eyes narrowed. He would play the usual squatter game of wheedling for pay for clearing.

"Nothin' at all t'this h'yar end the field, Mister."

He raised his lean, knotted hands and pointed over the beans and custard apple roots to the thick wall of growth that bounded the field.

Never before had the little patch of black looked so good or represented so much to him. He was losing it; but he was going to rid himself of the gray nights.

One-Eye had once said a man could get eternally lost if one foot left the field and the other followed.

"Thar she is, Mister! T'other side that wall lies the biggest field of tomaties in these parts."

Cartwright grunted assent born of his cupidity. Dade directed the two locaters to his palmetto shack with the promise of whisky there beneath the tow sacks. Together he and Cartwright walked toward the wall of moss and vine-hung foliage. Cartwright was voluble, full to the neck with lather of colonizing the land, flushed at the sight of the rich plum he had picked.

He hesitated a bit before plunging in; the thicket was dense as jungle. McCrackin reassured him, trying his best to keep his hands off the man's neck and leading the way farther and farther.

The voice of the fat man was lifted in a thin query.

"What's this?" he trebled, pointing with pudgy finger at a pencil-thick, color-ringed reptile.

DADE had meant to go farther in. Delay angered him, jangled his keyed-up nerves. He came back to where Cartwright was still watching the coral snake and was on him like a flash.

He kneaded the man's belly, tore at his fleshy throat with hands that were whip cord from the plow. He pounded the soft body down on the mold, thrust mold in the loose mouth to stifle a scream. With thorny vines he bound his wrists behind his back.

The little coral snake had crept under a moldy log.

Like a fiend Dade McCrackin raked his fingers in the ground till he tore it loose.

So tiny, so harmless-looking, but he knew better! Pinning the worm-like head to the ground with a twig, he grasped it in thumb and forefinger where its neck should have been, and reseated himself on Cartwright whose tongue was protruding, purple and swollen from much choking.

Its miniature fangs, hardly long enough to pierce a man's trousers, were within an inch of that tongue.

"I know you, Dade McCrackin." The politician said it carefully, his eyes filled with mute fear that he should move and touch the snake. "I'm willing to forgive and forget."

Dade laughed. It was his inning. And then again, if the man had only been of better metal. *He* had gone through worse than this.

Cartwright stared stupidly upward. He had been right. Six years ago! Well, if it hadn't been for all these developments, he would never have seen Dade McCrackin again. Six years ago these woods swallowed men whole.

"What you want?" He pressed his back against the earth. "For ——'s sake don't kill me, McCrackin!"

"It would be easy."

The tiny forked tongue licked Cartwright's lip.

"I'll give anything—land, money!"

The fat man spoke methodically, taking care not to overmove his lips.

Dade was weighing things. It came to him that even this he could not have. He would be no better than this man—this coward. All the old ash without even the ember of hatred would be with him. The McCrackin way was to kill.

When he spoke he was without spirit—and he spoke for the land.

Cartwright rose shaking as with ague; his lips, every muscle in his bulk of body, quivered at the cessation of the rigor his fear had imposed.

"Yes, I'll give it to you. The whole hundred and sixty acres, papers and all, McCrackin.

"Give? You'll give me nothin', drat you. Sell it, and no double crossin', yes!"

Now that he, Cartwright, was high in State affairs, he could afford to sell the man the land. He could not rid himself of him by the old tactics; finesse was the word now. No, he would do no hue-and-cry raising. Too precarious, entirely!

He waddled off toward the locaters, thanking his lucky stars.

THE first forty acres were cleared. They had helped pay for the whole one hundred and sixty. McCrackin was in a fair way toward being well-off.

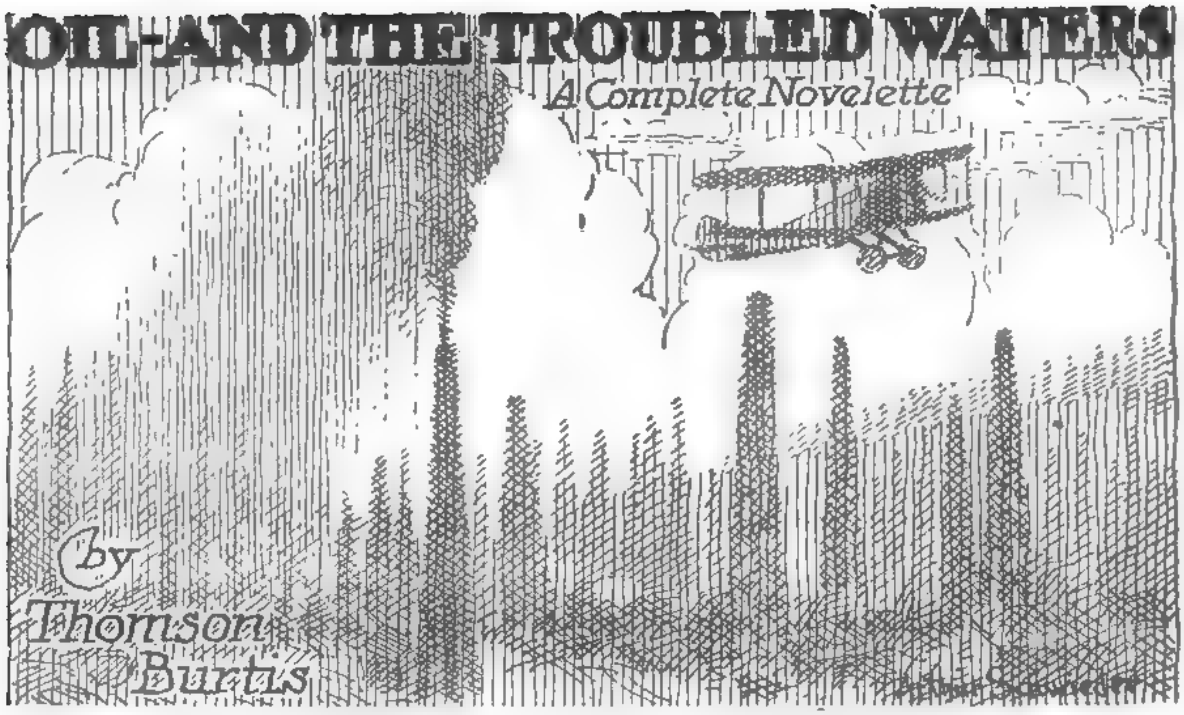
He liked to stretch his arms; they had pushed the wall back. Still, he wondered what it was about the black earth that held him so.

When he hauled lumber from Okeechobee City and put up the frame shack, it came to him. He loved it, for here was a place he could sit when the sun went down and hate Cartwright without being bothered.

He married a Tyler girl, and taught his children not to push the Ford over coral snakes.

OIL—AND THE TROUBLED WATERS

A Complete Novelette



by Thomson Burtis

Author of "Groody Among the Gushers," "The Indomitable Dub," etc.

FIRST LIEUTENANT HAL WATERS, in person, was a trifle more than two miles above the flat Texas fields which smiled below a blazing July sun. He was flying high to escape the heat. Donovan Field, the biggest aviation field in the country, was twenty miles behind, and the wild oil town which he was approaching at close to two miles a minute was fifty miles ahead of him.

The bellowing four hundred and fifty horse-power motor was clattering along smoothly, and Waters was eased back in his seat, flying automatically and allowing his thoughts to rove ahead to Hastings, latest and temporarily greatest of the oilfield metropoli.

The town itself did not interest him so much, although he had never been there. He had seen a few boom towns here and there before, as well as some other odd places of the earth which were on a par with even Mexia. Mexia set a standard for boom towns, forever and ever amen.

Waters was considerably more interested in old Adam Burney, whom he was going to see. Somewhat interested in Miss Gloria Munson too, perhaps, who was old Burney's ward, and young Francis Burney. Francis, always called Frank, was a gigantic, clear-eyed young Texan whose earthly ambition it was to be able to fly. At twenty-one, some years in the oilfields had made him a man outwardly, but in his adulation of the tall, blond pilot he was utterly boyish.

Waters lingered briefly on the gorgeous Miss Munson, then turned his attention to Burney somewhat self-consciously. Waters was thirty-two. After years on the continent, doing every thing from dancing in a Parisian café at the same time that he was a member of the secret staff of the Prefect of Police to working as a trained croupier at Monte Carlo the reserved, rather graceful flier had become distinctly woman-shy. The mere possibility of becoming greatly interested in one made him like a wild horse who shies fearfully at the whistle of the lariat.

He could truthfully say that neither Gloria, however, nor young Francis was responsible for his trip. Gloria and the youngster were cousins, and had recently spent a month in San Antone, where he had made their acquaintance. Just before they left Frank had mentioned the trip very shyly.

"Like to have you come down, Hal," he drawled in his habitual half-hesitant way. "Have you meet dad and see the field. And if you've got a little money I think dad can make you some with it. He's pretty big in the oil game, you know."

Waters had pricked up his ears at that. He had eight thousand dollars as a matter of fact, mostly because he had been in the

hospital for a solid year and had had no chance to spend anything. Then it would be pleasant, he had decided, to take a week end with Frank and Gloria and see Hastings.

His habitually narrowed gray eyes swept the instrument board absently as the De Haviland rushed along through the golden, cloud-flecked air as he wondered just what old Adam Burney would be like. The stories about him which passed from lip to lip through the midcontinent fields were such as to impress even a hard-boiled wanderer like Waters. He found it hard to reconcile his mental image of the old man with the gentle, broad-shouldered, boyish younger Burney.

The elder man's daring, his ruthlessness, the fight he had waged and won against the big companies—all were known far and wide. Starting on a shoestring back in the days of the Ranger pool, he had made a little money and then gambled sublimely on the Hastings field. It had proved up. Then instead of merely selling his acreage at a profit to big-company land men, he had secured capital and sunk wells himself to prove that there was oil on his acreage as well as on the tracts where the wildcat wells had come in.

Time after time he gambled up to thirty-five thousand dollars a well himself before selling out—and when he did sell out he held out for, and secured, a much higher comparative price than he could have expected had he merely sold on the strength of wells on surrounding acreage.

Thinking of the man's reputation, Hal was wondering how the oil king would receive him. There were stories about his jealousy of his ward, too. Many a good man had been booted off the front steps, according to stories which had gone the rounds. Waters, Gloria, and Frank had been a pretty clubby trio in San Antone, although Frank rarely went out with Gloria and Hal. Although Hal had no designs whatever—or at least did not believe he did have—on the imperious, impulsive, queenly Miss Munson, he had thought sometimes that he had seen a troubled look in Frank's eyes when he was with Gloria.

ABRUPTLY he cut off thoughts of a personal nature as he looked down and saw that his ship was now over a solid mass of fleecy white mist, gilded into marvelous beauty by the sun. It was like a far-stretching mountain range of snows—it seemed ridiculous to think that one could not land in one of those valleys. Hastings should be about five miles ahead; he must get down through the clouds and spot the town.

Soon he came to an opening—a very small one. Looking down, he could see many oil derricks. That was near Hastings, that was sure. Directly above the small vent in the mist he threw his ship into a tailspin by the simple process of stalling it and then putting on full right rudder. The nose, high in the air, dropped off to the right, and in a fast spin the ship corkscrewed toward the earth.

Before he got down through the close-pressing clouds he was slightly dizzy. Their nearness made the speed of the spin a terrific ordeal for even a veteran flyer. Soon he came through that thick layer on top, but he had to spiral down around several heavily floating cumulus clouds. He was only a thousand feet high when the last of them was above him.

Below him there was a far-stretching forest of derricks. He caught his breath as he looked at the scene below him. However, he must not linger on it at his low altitude, for he was directly over the town, in the center of the field, and there was not a possible landing place if the motor should cut out on him.

As he sped downward, pointed north, he picked out the huge white house which was the Burney home. Then he saw two figures one all in white, on the lawn, waving wildly. That would be Gloria and Francis. They would drive out to get him, Gloria had said, after they found out approximately where he had landed.

In a second the town was left behind, and a moment thereafter he was approaching the northern edge of the field. He could scarcely keep his eyes from wandering to the scene below him, but like all real flyers he was uneasy until he spotted a forced landing field, so he kept his gaze ahead, searching for a possible landing field. After locating that, he would take a few moments for a survey of the greatest oil pool in the Southwest.

He was just at the limit of the field when he noticed a well that was flowing. It was a gusher, and was "heading" strongly. The oil, in a thin spray, was clearing the crownblock of the hundred-and-twelve-foot

derrick. Lower down, where the oil came out of the hole, he could see the solid nine-inch column driving upward through the center of the derrick like a geyser. The crowd which was watching—it must be a new well which had just come in, Waters decided—was very close to the derrick, on the side from which the wind was coming.

Suddenly he banked steeply, although his altitude was only two hundred feet. There was a possible field directly ahead—not good, but useful in a pinch. This being the case, he forgot everything but what he saw on the ground. Behind his goggles his narrow gray eyes commenced to dance with a queer, cold flame.

A man standing alongside a horse had unmistakably hit another man in a huge sombrero who had been leaning against a car.

In a flash the little drama played itself to a tragic climax. From his perch two hundred feet above it the flier could watch every move.

The man who had been hit staggered, recovered, and lunged forward. Like a flash of light the other man's right arm shot forward, and the next second the bigger man had dropped. As he got to his knees he went for the gun in a holster at his hip. The crowd had surged forward, and a big man in a sombrero who was sitting in the car was half out of it. As the fallen gladiator went for his gun the forward rush of the crowd was abruptly checked. Many of them dropped to the ground.

Before the gun was half out of its holster the other man was in action. Hal had never seen anything so fast. From nowhere, apparently, a six-shooter in his hand was flashing in the sunlight. There was a second's hesitancy, as if he might be commanding his opponent to drop his gun. The next second the two guns spoke, but the prone gunman's firearm was a split second too late. He dropped from his knees and groveled on the ground.

With a single bound the younger man was in the saddle, and in an instant his horse was galloping wildly northward. For a full five seconds it seemed that all the onlookers were paralyzed at the rapidity of events. The horseman tore past the derrick, eluding the tearing hands of the roughnecks who tried to stop him. One of them wielded a big wrench which the rider avoided by a beautiful dodge. A rider of parts himself, Waters yelled with irrepressible satisfaction at the perfect coordination between horse and rider. The two took a wire fence in full stride.

Behind them a wildly excited crowd was milling around, most of them running aimlessly after the fugitive. There were a few scattering shots, but the rider kept on his way northward. The big man who had been in the car had his hat off and was stamping around in what looked like the first cousin to an apoplectic fit.

Hal dropped his De Haviland lower and went diving past the fleeing horseman. He could not quite decide what to do. He had machine guns on his ship; he could stop that man. But in his heart there was, as there is in any man worthy the name, a deep affection for the under dog. That fugitive had been the aggressor so far as a straight smash to the jaw was concerned, but his victim had drawn first.

Should he take a hand with his airplane, or mind his own business? The odds were great enough against that lone rider as it was, and something in the flashlike movements and utter competence and daring of the man had appealed to qualities inherent in the flier.

Directly ahead there was a long, mowed grass field which looked smooth. A road ran alongside it, which was an additional recommendation. The rider was on that road now, galloping along at an easy lope.

"Not ruining his horse!" Waters thought approvingly.

He could see the crowd running foolishly, a mile away, still on the gunman's trail. And three cars were bumping along a cross-road which joined the highway on which the horseman was traveling.

Hal gave his ship full gun and swept down a foot above the field. The rider was a quarter mile back now. The ship flashed along a foot above the ground, and he surveyed it expertly. Smooth, no perceptible bumps, plenty long enough. He zoomed upward at the end of the field, circled around until he was pointed back at the field and cut his throttle to idling. He was too close to the edge for his altitude—a hundred feet—so with the ease of a master flyer he tipped up his ton-and-a-half ship, applied top rudder and side-slipped it straight down.

Within twenty feet of the ground he straightened it with rudder and stick, and

as it floated across the fence at seventy-five miles an hour he applied full rudder. The terrific horizontal skid killed the speed, and the next second he had landed on three points and was trundling swiftly across the hard ground. It stopped fifty yards from the far fence, but he used his throttle to send the ship a little farther forward, and then turned it around.

Before cutting the switches he turned in his seat to look down the sandy country road. As he watched, the horseman topped a low-rolling rise and came galloping down the grade. Hal loosened his belt and vaulted out of the cockpit. Unconsciously his hand gripped the butt of the Colt .45, which Army airmen carry when flying.

The horseman was hatless, and his sandy hair, close-cropped, clung to his head in the suggestion of curls. He was young, Hal perceived, and dressed in the chaps, flannel shirt and neckerchief of a habitual rider in the country of prickly pear and cactus.

As he came closer, a gun appeared in his hand again with that eery swiftness which defied detection.

"Throw 'em up, mister!" he called sharply.

Giving no sign of surprize, Hal decided to do so. The horseman slid his mount to a stop and flung himself off. His face was thin and flat-cheeked, freckled below the deep mahogany tan, and his mouth was compressed to a thin line and his eyes blazing.

"Excuse me for bein' abrupt-like, but I'm in trouble," he said with a certain deadly calmness. "I'm gonna get in that airplane, and you're going tuh fly me away from here. I shot a man."

From far away the low drone of a speeding motor car came to their ears above the soft whisper of the idling Liberty.

"I saw you pop a man," Hal said easily. "Why should I help you away?"

"Because yuh'll git drilled from your wishbone to yore backbone if yuh don't!" snapped the rider.

Waters, unusually calm and clear-headed, as always in the presence of an emergency, inspected his man with mounting interest. There was nothing of the killer about him; he looked like the ordinary tall, clean-limbed rider of the surviving ranches of Texas.

"What good will killing me do? I can imagine nothing less useful to you than adding another man to your list," Waters said calmly, although tense excitement was seething within him.

The Texan started to speak and then checked himself abruptly. He whirled in his saddle, listening to the oncoming cars. In that second Waters knew that he had before him no habitual criminal, but a young fellow who for some reason had been driven to extremes and was amply competent to meet whatever came up.

"Listen," the flyer said conversationally. "I don't mind helping you—if I'm satisfied. I saw you hit a man, saw him draw on you, and you beat him to it. Satisfy me that you're in the right, and I'm at your service. I'm going to take down my hands. Now—why did you hit him?"

The tension, with that ever rising roar of the coming cars, frayed even Waters' steady nerves. The Texan's face was pale beneath the tan, and his face was tragically strained. Lines from his thin nostrils to his mouth were now deep furrows.

"Because he called me a ——!" he stated slowly, plainly controlling himself by a superhuman effort.

"I see. Argument?"

"Listen!" snapped the Texan as if his nerve had finally broken. It seemed as if the cars must top the rise at any second. "As man to man I'm right. They've robbed me and broke me and they'll lynch me, the hired ——, in just about thirty seconds! If yuh'll take my word and get me tuh the border I'll promise yuh I won't break my word nor steer yuh wrong. I ain't got time tuh tell yuh now; but I'm Happy Gaxton—yuh may've heard o' me—and I'm beggin' yuh tuh git me out o' here!"

With a sudden access of noise, like a monster which goes into full cry at the sight of his prey, a big car shot over the rise. Behind it was another, and as if in a dream Hal saw two familiar figures in the front seat and a horde of men in the rear.

"Let's go, cowboy!" he shouted, a rare boyish note in his voice.

THE two bounded to the ship as the car roared down the slope. In a trice the Texan was in the rear seat, and Hal was kneeling on his cushion in the front. He snapped Gaxton's belt and adjusted his own. The car ground to a stop, and a bullet whined overhead. Hal thought he heard a shrill cry from Gloria, but he could not be sure.

He jammed the throttle forward, for the motor was still going, and the De Haviland got under way. He glanced toward the fence—there were other cars coming now—and saw man after man throw down on the swiftly moving target and fire. A tall figure running toward the marksmen, was Frank. Trying to stop them probably. Gloria was still at the wheel of her blue car.

The firing was abortive. The ship was too far away and moving at sixty miles an hour, then seventy, then seventy-five. It took the air smoothly, and in a moment was swooping down over the astonished crowd. He held up his wrist watch and then two fingers, trying to convey to the girl that he'd be back in two hours. Francis waved, and he saw a big man snatch the young man's hand out of the air roughly and fairly fling him back. The flyer's face grew suddenly bleak as he watched. Loyal little kid that he was—Hal would have liked to see Gloria out there instead of at the wheel.

Then he turned eastward and set a dead course for Donovan Field. He was not going to the border—he was far from satisfied yet. Waters was not easily excited, but the thought that he had a man in the back seat who was wanted for murder, was helping him get away, and the possible consequences thereof were enough to make his mouth tighten a bit and a sardonic, one-sided smile play over it.

If that was Happy Gaxton, he did know of him. Gaxton had been a puncher on the Blakely ranch, and the year before had taken a total of eighteen prizes, including the title of all-round champion, at the rodeos in Cheyenne, Fort Worth, Pendleton and New York. He was generally considered the best all-round performer who had ever competed. There had been a story in the *San Antonio Express* regarding his turning down lucrative vaudeville offers to engage in the oil business—and Happy Gaxton was no desperado. All in all the pilot was not sorry he had acted as he had.

"Let the tail go with the hide," he told himself comfortably. Life was too short to become unduly exercised about the matter.

He flew around the field several times, getting altitude. At two thousand feet he took the stick between his knees and wrote a note on the back of an envelope:

We're going to Donovan Field—not the border. If you're all right and convince me of it you have nothing to worry about. You'll be well taken care of until I come back and find out what's what. Don't get careless with your gun; you won't come out of a wreck any nearer whole than I will if you take a shot at me.

Despite his conviction that Gaxton would not be crazy enough to take active measures of retaliation, there were a few seconds of breathless waiting while the puncher, stooped low to protect his eyes from the propeller wash and read the note. He saw Gaxton's face tighten and sudden menace leap into his eyes. For a second they blazed into the flier's with a maniacal light. Then he sank back in his seat and shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

Hal, who had had his Colt in his hand, ready for emergencies, deliberately turned, thrust it back in its holster and turned to his work. With the Liberty wide open and the slight Gulf breeze helping them along the De Haviland sped along at more than a hundred and thirty miles an hour across the oilfield, pointed west.

Waters' preoccupation with his own affairs was not sufficient to keep him from watching the awe-inspiring scene below. For miles there was spread a forest of derricks, and on many of the derrick floors the sweating roughnecks bent to their toil beneath the blistering sun. Pipe lines ran here and there, with offshoots to various flowing wells; and close to the derricks where drilling was going on were the great boilers, set a hundred and fifty feet away from the rig they served. Roads—most of them mere trails—crisscrossed the field in every direction, and a variety of vehicles ranging from heavily loaded wagons to great trucks and men on horseback were like continuous lines of insects crawling along them. The ground was black with oil, like a spotted desert.

It was a scene of crude, unlovely, Gargantuan industry, as stark and primitive and unlovely as can be found on earth. But somehow there came to Waters an overwhelming realization of the raw strength of the industry which wrings its riches from the earth.

In a moment the field was left behind, and in less than an hour San Antonio was beneath the ship. Then the mile-long row of shining white hangars on the northern edge of Donovan Field. Hal was thinking of Gloria and Frank. Would they understand? What would he run into—personal and official—back in Hastings?

After he had landed, taxied in to the line and cut off the motor he said to Gaxton:

"I'm going to leave you here while I go back and find out what's what. If what you've said is on the level, you've got little to worry about, now that you're out of their way for a while and they can cool down. Let's go."

Gaxton said nothing. The prominent Adam's apple in his long neck moved as if he tried to speak, but could not. Hal led Gaxton to his quarters, which he shared with a chubby young flier hight "Greasy" Jadwin. That Jadwin, in addition to his flying duties, was provost marshal of Field Two, and that he happened to be in, were two fortuitous circumstances which saved Waters an hour's running around in order to carry through the plan of self-protection he had outlined in his mind.

He explained what had happened, to Jadwin, who smoked his pipe rapidly and grinned beatifically at the recital. Then Waters turned to the silent, self-contained Texan.

"Who was it you shot?" he inquired.

"Gabby Williams," stated Gaxton.

For some reason the name seemed familiar to Waters. Before he could place it Gaxton went on:

"Right-hand man, especially for dirty work, of Old Man Burney, —— him!"

Waters' hand, poised over the cigaret box, stopped in mid air. The puncher's unemotionally bitter words hit him like a physical blow. The flier forced himself to take a cigaret and light it with a steady hand before he said—

"Tell us about it."

He had to fight himself constantly in order to concentrate on what Gaxton was saying. His mind was in a whirl, darting into a thousand byways. He had helped the murderer of Gloria's uncle's right-hand man—and now he remembered with what admiration and intimate friendliness Gloria had spoken of Williams. Queer how his mind had instinctively turned to her!

"I'm in the oil business," Gaxton said in the slow, soft drawl of the native Southwesterner. "Old Man Burney is high cockalorum down to Hastings. I got hold of a choice piece o' acreage. Wasn't choice then—is now. Burney gets his land when he wants it, by hook or crook, proves it up because he's got money and sells it tuh the big companies for all the traffic'll bear. He's been wantin' my acreage fur two months—at less'n it's worth.

"I been holdin' off. The big men didn't offer much—them land men and well-scouts is willin' fur Burney tuh prove up the land before they buy, an' then pay more fur it. The pool's got tuh have a limit somewhere—an' my land may be close to it. But I was willin' tuh gamble.

"Burney's been tryin' tuh handle me like he has others. Scare me intuh sellin'. What I been through is nobody's business—him and his two hundred roughnecks that're the scum o' Tampico and Oklahoma! Tryin' tuh make me want tuh get out o' town at any price! I rose up on my hind laigs a few weeks ago and told 'em plain I was goin' tuh start shootin' if I was bothered any more.

"Things was right peaceful fur a while. I was just waitin' till Burney used up the acreage he's been workin' on and had tuh come tuh me or quit business around Hastings. I got the only real close-in acreage he could take over an' develop. Big companies got the rest.

"Two nights ago I git in a poker game with this Williams and two other men that work fur Burney—Grady, his chief tool-pusher, and Maitland, one o' his drillers. They take me fur fourteen thousand simoleons—every nickel I got. Thinkin' back over it, how I was invited intuh the game and all, I know, Lieutenant, that I was rooked! Got intuh the game to be skinned out o' my *dinero* so I'd be broke an' have tuh sell! But I can't prove it.

"I was out tuh that new gusher—Burney Number 6—this afternoon. Burney was there, and Williams. Burney starts talkin' business, offerin' me three hundred an acre for acreage that's worth seven to eight hundred at the least calculation, and ought tuh be a thousand, bein' offset acreage from a tract that's got four producin' wells in twenty acres flowin' a total of thirty-five hundred barrels a day.

"I tell him nothin' doin'. He gets sore, and so does Williams.

"Gabby starts twittin' me on that poker game, and makin' threats unless I sell out to 'em. I come back at 'em, sayin' that I never lost so much before in *straight* poker. They prove they know they're crooks by flyin' into terrible tantrums. Williams calls me the name I told yuh, I socked 'im in the jaw, knocked him down again, he goes

fur his gun and I beat 'im to the draw."

Jadwin reached over solemnly, his hand out-thrust.

"Put 'er there, cowboy!" he said.

Gaxton smiled faintly and shook hands.

Waters got to his feet slowly.

"I'm going to leave you in the custody of no less than the provost marshal of Donovan Field," he stated. "Greasy, give me a little slip certifying that you have the prisoner. That, with my uniform, will keep me out of jail back in Hastings—maybe."

"What're you going to do back there, outside of seeing your girl——"

As the implications of the situation swept over him Jadwin stopped suddenly, his round face reddening with embarrassment.

Waters grinned a wry little grin.

"I'll just look around, talk to some men maybe and see what kind of a case can be be made out for Gaxton here. I'll probably have a very pleasant week-end."

"Delightful," agreed Jadwin, writing husily.

N HOUR later, having landed on the same field, Waters started to walk toward town. Events would soon prepare to make ready to begin to start, as he phrased it to himself. Waters even thought in a facetious vein he always had up to now. Why in ——, he inquired of himself and the universe at large, should a girl intrude on his thoughts so much all of a sudden? And he got no answer. True enough, it was an embarrassing predicament, because Burney was her uncle and all that—but the thought of Frank, Burney's son, didn't seem to bother him. Nor the almost certain result that his eight thousand would now have no opportunity to flourish like the green bay tree under the skilful cultivation of Mr. Adam Burney. It was a —— of a note, he decided.

Certain it was that the advent of the ship had created tremendous excitement throughout the field and in the town. He would be met soon by a stream of cars. Then the fireworks. In his heart he knew that he would be loyal to the interests of Gaxton unless he found that the Texan had lied. He also knew in his heart that if either Gloria or Frank objected, except in a halfway manner because of family loyalty, to the course he had taken they were unworthy of the pedestal whereon he had placed them. Particularly Gloria.

His gray eyes were a bit narrower than usual, and his lightly tanned, long face was a trifle flushed as he covered the ground with long, methodical strides, his head bent in thought. Then, topping the low rise ahead, came the leading car of a procession.

It was a rattle-trap Ford, holding a gaunt, generously mustached man in flannel shirt and black sombrero. There were two other men with him. Behind the flivver, inshining splendor, was a huge car with a big man at the wheel, Gloria beside him. In the rear seat the gigantic figure of Frank was plainly discernible.

He stepped to one side of the road and waited calmly. His sun-bleached eyebrows were raised a trifle, and a curious little tight-lipped smile made deep creases in his lean cheeks.

The Ford stopped beside him, and the lanky driver climbed out. A gun swung at his hip.

"You picked up Happy Gaxton and flew him away, didn't yuh?" he grated, his beetling gray eyebrows drawn together in a portentous frown.

"Uh-huh. Hello, Frank. You look natural in that outfit——"

Frank, six feet two of big-boned, fleshless manhood, wrung Waters' hand. His high-cheekboned face and blue eyes were very boyish and troubled as he met Waters' gaze. He had taken off his sombrero, and flipped it against his legs as if in unbearable nervousness.

The Ford driver hesitated as he saw the big man get out of the car, followed by Gloria. Hal's eyes rested on the girl's face steadily as she came toward him. When she deliberately refrained from greeting him his shoulders stiffened slightly, and he shifted his gaze to the stout figure of the man who he was sure was Burney.

The oil man's fleshy face was very red, and his prominent eyes bloodshot. He was dressed in a wrinkled Palm Beach suit, with a soft silk shirt and carelessly tied black bow tie. Despite exceedingly heavy jowls and a thin mouth he was an impressive-looking man—even handsome in a heavy, middle-aged way.

"This is the man. Arrest him, Chief!" he puffed, glaring at Hal.

"Yo're under arrest for aidin' and abettin' Happy Gaxton tuh escape, stranger!" said the officer of the law obediently.

"Just a minute," Waters returned coolly

There was something contemptuous in his careless brushing aside of the portentous minion of the law. "How are you, Gloria——"

"Come here, Frank!" sputtered Mr. Burney.

It was obvious that Frank was afraid of his father. He backed away slowly, his tanned face reflecting utter misery. His eyes seemed to be apologizing to Waters.

Gloria's regular features were undisturbed by any hint of feeling, except that her lower lip was drawn in between her teeth. Her wide eyes, however, held a gleam that was new to Waters. It made him wonder whether he really knew her or not.

"Don't even speak to me!" she said coldly, her head thrown back disdainfully.

"Any particular reason?" queried the pilot, showing no sign of the utter sinking feeling within him.

"Do you know what you did? That man murdered Mr. Williams, our dearest friend, and you helped him get away."

"Stop! I forbid either of you to talk to him!" Burney interrupted wrathfully. "Officer, do your duty!"

The strain of the last hour had its effect, and Waters allowed himself the luxury of releasing some of the savagery which suddenly consumed him.

"There's more melodrama to the square inch here than there ever was in 'East Lynne,'" he said evenly, and there was a sting in every quiet word. "If you, Mr. Burney, and your friend the officer will quit shouting long enough I'll tell you something. You're not going to arrest me. In the first place I'm an officer in the Army, on duty, and in the next place I delivered your man Gaxton into the custody of the provost marshal of Donovan Field for safekeeping.

"I took him away from here because he was afraid, and it looked to me probable that he'd be lynched by those roughnecks without a hearing. Here's your paper—receipt for him—and the whole thing is over. To close my little discourse, now that I've got a chance to talk for a minute before there's any more heroics around the place, you can get him, but he'll go free. I saw the whole thing, and he shot in self-defense. But he'll stand trial, of course."

There was a perverse pleasure in turning the knife in his own wound by adding that last statement that he was on Gaxton's side against the Burneys. The old man was literally beside himself with wrath as Waters' contemptuous words ceased. His face was red as a beet, and he seemed to be struggling to speak. There were flaring banners of color in Gloria's cheeks, and her eyes were snapping with the spitfire rage he knew so well.

Frank was standing a bit to one side, his eyes on Waters. They were glowing strangely, and he seemed tensed as if ready to spring forward.

For a moment there was utter silence. The chief of police examined Jadwin's receipt slowly and then handed it to Burney. The two deputies in the car sat stoically, both chewing tobacco. Gloria, wonderfully lovely in the flooding sunlight, did not deign to glance at the slip of paper in Burney's shaking hand.

The road was clogged with cars now, and dozens of people were approaching hesitantly. They stood in a semicircle a few feet away, watching.

"Well, what are you going to do about it? Want to phone the provost marshal's office at Donovan?" asked Waters finally.

His eyes met Burney's, and he had never seen such utter ferocity as was mirrored in the oil man's face. Finally Burney turned away and slowly returned the paper to the chief. At last he spoke, and Hal could scarcely believe his ears.

"It don't excuse Lieutenant Waters, Chief, but if the man's safe in jail it ain't so bad. I suggest you call up and make sure that he's still there."

Gloria's head turned sharply, and her eyes flashed to her uncle's face. Frank's face was suddenly glowing. Apparently both of them were tremendously surprised—and Frank at least was very happy.

"By the way, did Gaxton kill Mr. Williams?" Hal asked.

"No. He'll live. Got 'em through the lung," rasped the chief.

Hal heaved a sigh of relief. Somehow the drawling rider had appealed strongly to him—and Burney, despite his friendship with Frank and Gloria most emphatically did not.

The oil man stepped forward, and Waters nearly lost his contained poise as he saw that Burney's fat hand was outstretched.

"Lieutenant, you're down here as Gloria's guest, and I'm sorry this happened. I apologize, sir. You must understand that

I condemn what you did utterly. But I can understand your doing it. My oldest and best friend was nearly murdered, sir, by a an undesirable citizen. I believe you, though, and I'm sorry I spoke as I did, even though, under similar circumstances, I'd do it again. I could tear Gaxton limb from limb!"

Waters shook hands in more or less of a daze. The oil man was smiling, although his crimson-flecked eyes did not reflect the determined, dignified friendliness of his words.

"It's an unfortunate situation, Mr. Burney; or was," Waters responded, and instinctively his eyes sought Gloria's.

"Will you forgive me, too?" he asked in low tones.

"Oh, I suppose so. But why are you such a fool, Hal?"

"If I wasn't a fool I wouldn't even be here, perhaps," he replied, and turned to Frank.

"Here, here! No quarrels, young folks!" said Burney loudly. "Get your suitcase, Lieutenant, and let's go to the house."

Hal sat beside Frank in the rear seat, on the way to the house. The young Texan leaned over and whispered, "great stuff, Hal!" and then relapsed into silence while Burney talked oil.

Hal listened closely enough to make sensible answers when the occasion arose, which was infrequently. But his mind was busy with the mystery of Burney's sudden change of front. He might have taken it at face value, unbelievable as it was, had it not been for Gaxton's bitter estimate of the man. He looked the two-fisted, dictatorial business buccaneer which was his reputation—and yet, to Waters, there seemed to be a streak of pettiness in him. That wild rage of his—The things Gaxton had mentioned— Was Burney really his friend?

And Gloria? Where did she stand? With a bitterness he could not quite understand he reflected that she had condemned him without a hearing and even now was in the front seat, riding silently, unable to let bygones be bygones.

He had no opportunity to talk to her before dinner, but he and Frank had a short conversation about the inevitable topic—the boy's insane desire to learn to fly and establish airplane service in the oilfields, for both joy-riding and business purposes. It seemed peculiar to Waters to think of Frank as being so absolutely under the thumb of his father, for the young Texan, when by himself, was a preternaturally poised, self-reliant individual. Hal had found that out in San Antone.

During dinner, which was a meal well served by an aged negro, Burney talked oil. He made no reference to Waters' making any investment. Possibly Frank had left it to Hal himself to mention that, Hal reflected.

AFTER dinner the oil man suggested bluntly that he and Waters take a walk over the grounds while they smoked their cigars. It was plain that he wanted to talk to the Army man alone.

Waters, anticipating some conversation about investing in oil, was utterly surprized. Burney started quizzing him about personal matters; what his experience had been, what his plans were, and whether or not he had any future prospects aside from the Army. Waters was literally driven to his conclusion.

"Burney thinks I'm trying to marry Gloria, by all that's holy!" he thought to himself. "By George, he said back there on the road that I was Gloria's guest! She must have put it that way to him, and he's trying to find out all about me to see whether I'm fit for her financially!"

It was a half-straightened, half-amused, and just a little bit pleased Waters who told the old man his Army salary, informed him that he was going to stay in the Army until flying lost its kick and gave him other items which were none of Burney's business.

As a finale Burney asked him bluntly whether he had put any money aside from his Army pay, thus proving that Frank had said nothing to him about Waters' investing any money in the oil game.

"Eight thousand dollars is all," Hal replied. "I saved that one way and another—mostly during the times I was laid up in the hospital."

Burney switched the conversation to oil again, somewhat to the flier's relief. He had been half-expecting some definite word which would indicate that Burney was quizzing him as a future husband for Gloria. Somehow it appeared that Gloria was more *en rapport* with her uncle than was Frank, his own son. And, as a matter of fact, Hal had the impression that Burney thought more of his niece than he did of the boy.

As they strolled back toward the house Burney said suddenly:

"Well, I guess I'll call up some of the boys for a little poker game. Ever play, Lieutenant?"

"Often. The best card game in the world, I think."

"When it's played right," agreed the oil man, laughing loudly. "These limit games, though—I don't care whether it's a quarter or five dollars or twenty—aren't poker."

"I agree with you there."

"How about sitting in tonight? Stand a hundred-dollar take-out and table stakes? Sure you can, with eight thousand in the bank—if you've got confidence in your judgment; eh what?"

In an instant Waters took warning. Ever since Burney's change from ferocity to friendliness there had been an element of distrust in the pilot's feeling toward the older man—and there was Gaxton's statement. Yet the man had been friendly during the evening, and it did not seem possible——

"Sure, sit in. Now that Williams is laid up our little five-handed draw game is busted up and we need a new recruit," Burney said. "Come on, boy. We ain't so good. I'll count on you, and go downtown after the boys."

"If Gloria and Frank wouldn't feel slighted——"

"Pshaw! Yuh got the whole week end, ain't yuh? There's a time and place for men tuh get together, and then there's others for women tuh horn in."

What decided Waters to accept was his feeling that he should defer to the old codger in every way for his own sake—and Gloria's. Surely she would realize that. And then there was his deep love for the game, which he played with natural skill that had been made into what amounted to genius by long training under skilful teachers in the ranks of the professional gamblers. Last but not least there was the dim possibility that there might be something in the air—an emergency, so to speak.

Such moments in life were meat and drink to Waters. So he said yes, and Burney promptly roared off toward town after the other players.

Gloria appeared for a moment in the doorway, announced that she had to write bread-and-butter letters to San Antonio and left with one of the warm smiles which always made Hal forget momentarily the things she had said and done which were unworthy of her.

Frank came out on the porch as she left, and he relaxed comfortably as they flipped light badinage back and forth in their usual manner. Waters' dry, deliberate facetiousness always gave Frank a kick.

Burney was back within a half-hour. No sooner had Hal been introduced to the other three players than all his suspicions returned with added force. For two of the men were Grady, Burney's chief tool-pusher, and Maitland, a driller. These two men Gaxton had mentioned along with Williams. Grady was short, stocky, bullet-headed, red-haired. Maitland was tall, deeply tanned, with light gray eyes set close beside a long, thin nose. The third man was well-dressed, and had a fleshy, impassive face below thinning gray hair. He wore nose glasses.

Neither Maitland nor Grady seemed particularly friendly. Doubtless they had both been intimate friends of Williams and could easily contain their enthusiasm about the man who had helped Gaxton.

Burney constituted himself banker, and proceeded to count out the chips.

"We play straight draw poker except for one hand of stud after each hand of threes or better," he stated. "Suit you, Waters?"

Hal nodded.

"Hundred-dollar take-out, table stakes, with each man privileged to declare any amount behind his hand *before* a hand is dealt. We always all announce five hundred behind to start."

Waters gave no sign that he was surprized—but that *was* a poker game, particularly with stud hands in! He said steadily—

"Suits me!"

THE game started with Burney dealing. Two sealed decks of ordinary playing cards, one red and the other blue backed, were produced by Johnson, the granite-faced man in glasses. The red one was used to start.

In a little less than an hour Waters was over five hundred dollars winner. He played poker with an almost ferocious concentration. He had served an apprenticeship in the game with some of the cleverest gamblers on the continent—not only poker, but most other card games. And the result was that he played poker in the same way,

which is responsible for the fact that a good professional gambler, playing straight, can beat any group of ordinarily good players ninety-nine games out of a hundred.

There was not a single thought in Hal's mind aside from the game. He watched every move of every man and missed nothing. His eyes scanned each face as they looked at their cards.

Not only that, but he followed the cards. For instance, if three kings had been out, either together or separately in one hand, and two aces, he watched where they went in the deck. He watched the shuffle and cut—and nine times out of ten he could tell approximately whether the high cards of the previous deal were in the top or bottom half of the deck. If the two aces were in the top half on the deal, and he had a pair of aces in his hand to draw to, one of the aces which had been out before and one of another suit, he would throw his pair away without drawing unless the pot was very cheap. The chances were, in that case, that one of the remaining two aces was in some one else's hand. Just a tiny bit of percentage—and in the long run percentage *always* wins in gambling.

Poker the way Hal played it would have been hard, grinding work to the average man. Because he was in a game which was steeper than he could afford, and because he was half suspicious of it, he was unusually observant and alert. He played his game to the last notch—and the essence of his game, as in the case of all good poker players, was to vary his play, either raise or lay down, and to start a bluff before the draw.

Within twenty minutes, by having the good fortune to get enough cards to operate on, he had the other players completely at sea. He got three aces pat on the seventh hand, and was convinced that there was nothing crooked about the deal. The pot was opened by Burney for ten dollars and raised by Hal twenty, with two stayers. He was called by Burney, and won.

A few hands later he raised on nothing whatever, before the draw, drew two cards, bet out, and won. He did the same thing a second time, was called, and showed nothing. Which he did not object to. A bluff is an investment if made properly and called.

A few hands later he opened a pot on a pair of jacks. Maitland and Grady stayed, each taking three cards. Hal, the last one to draw, took only one and bet fifteen dollars. Grady threw down aces and Maitland queens. When Hal was forced to show his openers, still only a pair of jacks, Burney smote the table irritably with his hand.

"I never *saw* such playing!" he snorted, and it might have been either a compliment or an insult.

As a result of this sort of playing, Hal was five hundred ahead in an hour without having held a pat hand, and only three sets of threes. Later when the real hands began to come he'd tighten up—and get a lot of calls.

Furthermore, as a result of continuous, concentrated observation, he had learned that Burney, after looking at his cards, folded them together again a bit more slowly if he had a fair hand than when he had nothing. Maitland gave no indication as between a fair hand, say two pairs, and nothing at all, but on a good hand he stopped his incessant chewing of tobacco for a few seconds as he peered carefully at his hand. Johnson was utterly non-committal and impassive, and the best player of the three. Grady was hard to figure, although he was starting to slam down his cards if he had nothing and growl about his luck. Both he and Burney were afflicted with too much curiosity—called too easily on two pairs. Maitland was ultra-conservative, which won Hal four pots from him on bluffs. Johnson was a rattling good player who might do anything.

Grady and Burney had bought twice and Maitland once when Burney suddenly announced a thousand behind his hand. Maitland and Grady followed suit. This, they explained, was to stay even with Waters and Johnson, the winners.

After a half hour more of quiet, uneventful play, it came to Johnson's deal. As he finished riffling the cards and shoved them to Maitland to cut Burney said:

"By the way, Lieutenant, look at that humidor over there. Right from India, that is, and cost me three hundred dollars in England a few years ago."

Hal turned his head to follow Burney's pointing finger, duly admired the humidor, and picked up his cards. He beheld four sevens. And instantly he was certain that a cold deck had been slipped in while he was looking at the humidor.

In a few seconds, face to face with a concrete problem, his mind reviewed the

possibilities. He was certain it was a crooked deal—and yet it was unthinkable that Burney, with the aid of his henchmen, should play crooked poker for the money involved. He was a rich man. What other object could he have? In Gaxton's case there was a motive—to force Gaxton to sell his acreage at a sacrifice because he had lost all his money. But was he, Waters, a total idiot to think he was being swindled?

Was it possible that what he had done for Gaxton, plus his sarcastic words when he had first met Burney, with his avowed espousal of Gaxton's cause to help make the whole thing worse, was enough to make Burney his enemy? Was the man's friendly attitude merely camouflage? Was he taking revenge by planning to get every nickel the flier had—or perhaps to tempt him into such high play that he would put himself in Burney's power? He might want to bring pressure to bear to force Waters to testify against Gaxton. If Gaxton had been lynched, Burney could have secured the acreage easily probably. He might hold many things against Waters.

All these possibilities surged through the pilot's mind, and in the end his decision was the same: There was a strong possibility that there was a nigger in the woodpile, and it would be madness not to play the hand that way. And yet he must not show his suspicion too strongly.

Burney opened, and Maitland stayed. Johnson raised the opening bet of twenty thirty dollars more. Hal hesitated briefly and shoved in his fifty. Burney glanced at him quickly, as if in surprize, and even Johnson's light eyes flicked sharply toward the flier's face. Burney cleared his throat.

"Boys, I got 'em," he announced loudly "She's up fifty more."

Maitland dropped, and Johnson stayed. He hesitated, and glanced again at Waters.

"If this is a cold deck, he thinks surely I'll raise again," Hal decided.

The next moment he was absolutely certain that all his suspicions were correct. When he merely stayed for the other fifty, instead of reraising, there was palpable surprize mirrored in Burney's face. Johnson was too good a poker player to show any symptoms of astonishment, but Maitland and Grady glanced at each other.

Johnson was dealing, and Hal was first to draw.

"One card," ordered the flyer, and deliberately discarded one of his four sevens, taking care that no one see it.

"I'll play what I got," stated Burney, his bloodshot eyes focused on Hal.

"I'll take one," Johnson said in his high, mild voice.

"I'm betting three hundred dollars—a lot of mazuma!" rasped Burney.

Deliberately Johnson counted out six hundred dollars' worth of chips.

"I filled," he said softly. "Up three hundred."

"Too much for me!" Hal said regretfully, his eyes flitting from face to face. "My three little sevens don't belong here!"

He spread his hand for their inspection, carelessly. Three sevens, an eight and a king. Then he threw it in and had a quiet laugh to himself at his nonplused playing companions.

By discarding his seven he had saved himself from staying in the pot and losing a lot of money or—letting them know he suspected them. He could get away with making them think there was some mistake in the stacked deck—three sevens to him instead of four—whereas had he simply thrown down his hand at the beginning they would have known immediately that he was wise. And he intended to get his hooks into them, by hook or crook. It should be easy to rook them out of some money—and his cold contempt for them was such as to make the prospect a pleasure.

On the showdown, which came after considerable bluff betting, Burney had a flush and Johnson four queens.

There was considerable tension around the table for a while, as if the oil men were uneasy. Finally it passed off, however, and the game became rapidly wilder. Hal was about seven hundred ahead, Johnson the same, and the others were all losers, Burney most of all. A good dodge to divert any possible suspicion from himself, Hal figured.

Scrutinizing every move and bet as he was, it was not hard for Hal to solve their next operation. They started trying to freeze him out of pot after pot by raising and reraising regardless of what they had. He deliberately made small bets on pairs or two pairs and let himself be apparently scared out by them.

Then three queens came his way. He opened, drew only one card and took a chance. He bet, Burney raised him, Maitland just called, and Johnson raised two

hundred dollars. Instead of raising himself, Hal merely stayed and acted somewhat dubious about that. If he reraised, he might scare them, and according to the draws three queens was a logical hand for a good play.

True to form, Burney went up again, and Johnson followed suit. It made Hal sweat to keep in that terrific pot on three queens, but he finally won eight hundred dollars against Burney's absolutely valueless hand and Johnson's one pair of aces. Johnson did not want to show his hand, evidently feeling that the two small hands were tip-offs, especially as Hal had stayed for so much on merely threes.

That pot stopped the reraising business, and a very puzzled, almost frightened group of oil men and crooked poker players were sitting around the table. Hal lounged back in his chair, made an occasional mocking remark and played his game.

IT WAS a temptation, almost irresistible, to let Gloria intrude in his thoughts. He was sick at heart as he learned more and more of Burney. Somehow it seemed to make Gloria utterly inaccessible. And he must be loyal to Gaxton. His testimony about the poker game would almost automatically free the cowpuncher, verifying Gaxton's story as it did. The average Texas jury would acquit Gaxton for the shooting merely on the strength of the crooked poker.

There was one way whereby he might help Gaxton without publicity which would ruin the reputation of Burney and make Gloria Hal's enemy for life.

And it happened. Hal was two thousand dollars ahead, and it was one in the morning. So far as he could tell, the game had been absolutely straight since he had spiked the reraising business. Then Burney asked Hal to close a window which, he claimed, was giving entrance to a draft which would stimulate his lumbago.

Hal was not surprized to find an ace full in his hand after the deal. They had figured that the three sevens occurence had been a slip-up on their part in stacking the cold deck, and were taking another chance. Likewise, the game had been changed to no limit.

"We all know we're good, and I can vouch for Waters here up to eight thousand," Burney had said.

Waters had acquiesced. But try to catch him in there without a lead-pipe cinch!

He surveyed his ace full with narrowed eyes. His face wore a half-bitter, half-sardonic little smile as he heard Burney open again, Maitland raise, Johnson stay. It now cost three hundred dollars to stay.

"I'm not in," Hal said deliberately, and threw his cards face up on the table.

There was an interval of a full ten seconds. An ace full, discarded, was in plain sight, and the inference was unmistakable.

Burney's face was a pasty white. Maitland, eyes on the cards as if hypnotized, stopped chewing. Johnson never moved a muscle; but Grady's freckled face was red as fire, and he wet his lips constantly with his tongue.

Hal took the plunge. He was tense as a jockey at the barrier.

"That shows you I'm wise to you. I had four sevens before and discarded one to keep from letting you know I was wise. I know the crooked work you've been doing. Gaxton told me that your same gang, with Williams in instead of you, Burney, took him for every dime. You wanted to get me to revenge yourselves on me for helping Gaxton out, I presume. Maybe you had other reasons, Burney."

He was talking in level tones, and gradually Burney's face became crimson. His cheeks puffed out as if he were going to burst, and his eyes were suffused with blood.

"Now listen."

It was like the crack of a whip, and he proceeded to lay down the law.

"If the Gaxton case comes to trial he'll tell about the poker game as leading up to the shooting. I'll take the stand and tell my story—what I know about this game, and what I saw out in the field. Between us we'll blow your reputation into smithereens, Burney.

"There's one way out for you. Drop the case against Gaxton completely. You can handle the sheriff, I presume. Anyway withdraw your complaint and admit William's culpability. And I'll keep my mouth shut—until you start hounding Happy Gaxton some more with your hired thugs and sure-thing card men!"

He had a feeling that with every word he was sealing his own fate with Gloria. True, he could hold this over Burney's head and force his acceptance of the marriage if

Gloria said yes—but somehow the intimate affection between the two, and Gloria's indecision up to now, made him feel instinctively that the old man could find a way to ruin him with her. Perhaps not—but whether he could or not, the grim-faced flier was incapable of double-crossing Gaxton, even for Gloria.

There was a brief interval of utter silence while the oil men exchanged looks. Burney was leaning forward, both hands resting on the table, and once again there was that animal-like ferocity in his bloodshot eyes which Hal had seen before. Finally he spoke, and his speech was thick with rage.

"All right, mister. You and Happy Gaxton can go to —— together with no interference from me. And now, —— you, get out of my house and stay out. If I ever hear of you sayin' one word to Gloria or——"

"Don't talk too much, Burney," Waters interrupted softly. "I've got sort of a club to use on you, you know——"

It was simply an idle remark, with the idea of seeing what Burney's reaction would be. The old man got to his feet, one finger jabbing into the air and his face contorted with fury.

"You can talk from now tuh doomsday, anywhere but in court, for all of me! If you had yore evidence in black and white it wouldn't make no difference to me, or Gloria either! Think anybody'd believe it if yuh told it around? Get out of my house, I said——"

He stopped abruptly, his eyes frozen to the door. Waters looked around and beheld Gloria standing there, sweeping the room with wide eyes.

"What—what's the matter?" she asked, a trifle breathlessly.

"A little trouble about the card game," Waters returned. "Mr. Burney, please cash my chips."

It was Waters' habit to have his chips neatly stacked and classified at all times. In less than a minute Burney had cashed them. Not a word was spoken while he did it. Waters looked at Gloria twice, but there was no hint of sympathy for him in her stony face.

"I've been ordered to leave the house, Gloria," Waters said finally, and there was an inarticulate plea in his eyes.

"What happened?" she asked Burney, taking no notice of Waters.

"He accused us—all of us—of cheating at cards!" bellowed the oil man. "Why, the pup——"

"And proved it," Waters inserted urbanely.

Gloria turned on the flier furiously.

"Get out—and stay out!" she screamed, two high spots of color flaming through the rouge on her cheeks.

Waters bowed and went out of the door. Never to his dying day would he forget that tableau—Burney leaning against the table, his big body shaking; Gloria standing, erect and beside herself with rage; the others sitting quietly, as if dumfounded, around the table.

He decided to spend the night out at the ship, because of the late hour. On the way out, he had a chance to "get things set in my mind," as he expressed it. Burney did not dare have Gaxton and himself tell their stories in court. But, secure in his position, he was willing to chance any mere gossip which the two might start. And he had evidently been utterly certain of Gloria's loyalty under any and all circumstances.

As Waters thought of the girl his lips curved in a grin, and suddenly he threw back his head and laughed. The first wretchedness had turned into a curious feeling of freedom. She had shown her true colors during the afternoon, to say nothing of the evening. Probably he'd never have really fallen in love with her, but he might have.

"Gosh! Just when you think you're foolproof, some good-looking woman comes along and takes you like Grant took Richmond!" he chuckled. "I wouldn't be surprized if that cold-blooded lady had an interest somewhere——"

SUDDENLY the noise of galloping hoofs brought him back to earth abruptly. He had reached the ship by this time. He took out his Colt and remained leaning against the fence which bounded the field.

In a few seconds the pony topped the rise in the road, looming eerily against the silver sky. Waters squinted at the huge figure on its back.

"Frank, I believe!" he ejaculated.

It was. The young Southerner threw himself off the horse, dropping the reins over its head.

"Lo, Hal. What the —— happened

back there? Somethin' in the card game?" he drawled.

He had changed abruptly from a scared boy into a poised man as he rolled a cigaret.

"Yes, we had some trouble."

"I heard Pop and Gloria talkin' about it. The old reprobate is aimin' tuh have yuh tarred and feathered, Hal, on account of all that's happened. Wouldn't be surprized if the old skinflint would cheat at cards if he wanted to."

"Tarred and feathered!" sputtered Waters. "Well, by ——! That's going pretty far!"

"Figures yuh'll be so ashamed of all of it you might slink away somewhere—kind of spoil your immediate career," grinned Frank. "That's the reason I came out. They know I'm pretty strong for you, so they didn't tell me. I just overheard Pop and Maitland and that gang plannin' it. I'm through with him. He isn't my father, I might as well tell yuh now. He's my stepfather."

Waters could only stare his surprize. Things were coming fast.

"My mother was a widow when he married her, but he wanted me to take his name and not tell anybody I wasn't his son. He's been pretty nice to me—but I can't stomach what little I know of's been going on, like Happy Gaxton, for instance. He's goin' wild since he got to be somebody."

"Well, thanks for coming out to warn me, Frank," Waters said, not knowing what he could say in reply to Frank's confidences.

"That's all right. I'm pullin' up stakes, Hal. How about me goin' in with you? I've got money—fifty thousand or more. My mother left me a little, and Burney made a lot out of it for me. It's in my name—has been for three months, since I was twenty-one—in a San Antone bank. I'll buy me a ship and hire you tuh teach me tuh fly it, and then I'll start that airplane business in the oilfields. There's a fortune in it, Hal! And chances to pick up *dinero* on leases, too. I'd like tuh get you t' get out and throw in with me."

"Maybe I will, Frank, at that!" Waters told him. "Say, I——"

"One thing more I want tuh tell yuh. Maybe it won't make yuh feel so good."

Frank squinted up at Hal from beneath his sombrero as if appraising him.

"Gloria ain't Burney's niece at all, though she is his ward," he went on finally. "He's in love with her, and it's my notion Gloria is with him—or his money. He met her a couple of years ago and went crazy about her. Her daddy he knew years ago.

"I like her all right. But she wouldn't marry him unless he'd settle a lot of money on her. I don't know just how much. She figured he was liable to lose his *dinero*, this oil business being a gamble and him being a plunger. He's pretty mean about money too, in a way. He'll argue for days over a five-hundred-dollar difference in a hundred-thousand-dollar deal. She stood her ground, and he wouldn't give in. I picked up all the dope, little by little.

"I think she just took up with you like she has with others, to make him jealous and tantalize him intuh comin' around tuh her way o' thinkin'. I couldn't say anything. I thought maybe she did like yuh, for a while. Were you pretty sweet on her?"

"Not enough to hurt me," smiled Waters.

"She's just a cold-blooded leech, thinkin' o' Gloria all the time. Dad was her meal ticket; she'd side with him against you or anybody, any time. Women're funny, ain't they? When they're O.K. they're better'n any one o' the twelve apostles, but when they get hard-boiled, any way whatever, they shore can teach a man tricks he never knew."

Waters grinned at this drawled wisdom from the babes and sucklings. There were times when Frank of the oilfields seemed a million years old, and others when he might have been a prep school-student.

"Well, what're we going to do about this little feather party?" queried the flier. "The moon's bright; how about a moonlight flight back to Donovan? Are you ready to ramble as you are?"

"Sure!" yelped the delighted Texan. "I was hopin'— Listen! They ain't lost any time; they're on their way tuh get you now so you won't slip 'em!"

Sure enough, as plain, as the whisper of the wind in the mesquite, there came to Hal's ears the muffled thuds of several horses, hard-ridden.

They reached the ship before the riders had come in sight.

"Get in the back seat, and after I pull down the prop whirl this little wheel as you snap on this lever," he told Frank briefly. The flying enthusiast had been instructed in the instruments of a ship for many hours back at Donovan by Hal himself.

If worst came to worst and the ship would not start there was always the Colt to resort to. Hal spun the propeller mightily to suck gas into the cylinders, and as the riders galloped into view a few hundred yards away he yelled—

"Now!"

With all the strength in his powerful shoulders he pulled down on the prop and sprang aside. As the first wild yell of the half-dozen men resounded through the quiet air the motor roared into life. He was in the cockpit while they were still two hundred yards away. He gave the ship the gun immediately. It had been a hot day and night, and the motor would not be too cold.

They were safely off the ground many yards from the fence, and the Liberty ran without a miss. He took time to turn around and smile encouragingly into the glowing eyes of his passenger, who was gripping the cowling with both hands and grinning delightedly as he looked down at the moon-silvered world below.

A sudden freakish idea took possession of the flier. Because he was usually reserved, when he did run amuck he went to extremes. In the back of his mind he knew it was foolhardy in a way, and yet he felt instinctively that this was his night. He was bound to have some fun with those roughnecks below.

They were still grouped in the road as he circled the field, motor well throttled to give it a chance to warm properly. When the temperature was eighty and the oil pressure twenty-five he banked around and set sail for his target. They were galloping back toward Hastings by then.

The road was wide, and the fences set least a hundred feet apart. There was plenty of leeway for the wings. He swooped down until his wheels were only a foot or so above the roadway, and roared along toward the riders.

What he had figured on happened. The ponies went wild. Three of them leaped the fences, and the others tore wildly up the road, completely out of control. Two of the riders were thrown.

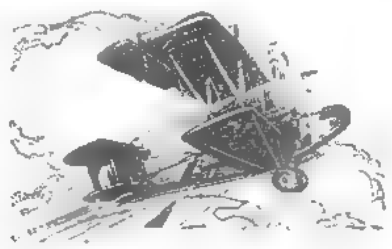
For several minutes he paid attention to one of the scattered riders at a time. Four men had been thrown now as the terrified horses went berserk. The riderless mounts he chased until they were scattered for miles to all points of the compass.

Taking care that his bursts were a safe distance from any member of the proposed social feathering party, he proceeded to scare them to death by sending streams of machine-gun bullets into the ground close by them. This little feature of the evening's entertainment was hugely pleasing to the young man in the back seat. Frank tried to laugh repeatedly, but the wind nearly strangled him each time.

The victims cowered in clumps of mesquite until Hal drove them out, one by one. Time after time, to vary the firing, he swooped down at them and made them fall prone on the ground to escape. In twenty minutes he had run them into complete exhaustion. They simply lay flat on the ground, motionless, and occasionally they raised their arms feebly in token of surrender.

This consummation so devoutly to be wished seemed to conclude the festivities, to Hal's mind. He turned toward Donovan Field; and the ship, its exhaust pipes glowing a triumphant red, hurled itself along through the moonlit night, flying high with as satisfied a cargo as the stars ever winked at.

Happy Gaxton and Greasy Jadwin welcomed them with the utmost cordiality. In fact, the foursome got along famously. According to Lieutenant Jones, who lived in the next quarters, the was awakened at four A.M. by a quartet singing an aria from some old opera. The only words Lieutenant Jones caught were "Shweet Adeline."



Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

CHIGGERS, chigoes, niguas, coloradillos garrapatas. Three 1921 and 1922 letters from our cache:

East Orange, New Jersey.

Are the "chiggers" we encountered in the 10th of December issue such little red ticks as get the grip on one when, in Hispanic America, we wander in grassy fields or brush against green bushes on which they have foregathered?

Or is a chigger a minute flea that doesn't shake a lively leg, when you try to put a finger on it, but is of retiring nature, and creeps from floor up on your bare foot and retires to a safe refuge, between your epidermis and the "red blooded man" or meat beneath, there to carry on a productive—can one precisely call it an industry? But, anyway, that *chigoe* has there a very productive existence; and the myriad young it produces bore their irritating way under one's skin, each to start its own productive colony.

Whether the chigger mentioned by C. N. H. is the gaily skipping flea, or tick such as the coloradillos that are quite as irritating, he deserves thanks from those who may require a way for ridding their skins of these pests.

BUT, since one may pass some time, and travel many miles where in Latin America no butter may be had, to make his knockout, mayhap I too may deserve a thank you, by telling of my remedy that hasn't yet failed, is easy to get and to carry, and isn't costly beyond reason. Good preachers teach, sometimes, by illustrations; therefore:

The sixteen-year-old daughter of the house went about her Honduras home, and I saw that her ash-gray feet and ankles were altogether bigger than was natural. I ventured to ask the reason, and got it in a word—"*Niguas!*"

A few cupfuls of emulsion in which was a rather liberal number of spoonfuls of kerosene, a bit of cloth with which to dab that emulsion on those feet and ankles, and the thing was done; so was the nation of *chigoes* also.

A day later all that dead skin and the *niguas* came away together, and went into the fire. Those

feet and ankles were as pink as a baby's, and almost as tender. That girl had to wear her shoes a few week days!

Every one of the many times I've prescribed this remedy for an annoying condition, the results have been good and thorough. In the quarter of a century during which I've tried it not more than half a dozen *niguas*, or *chigoes*, have had lodging under my hide. This is because my bare foot has not touched a bare floor in *nigua* lands in all those years, except in baths; and the *nigua* doesn't stay where water does.

THE *garrapata*—a *garra* is a claw, and your foot is a *pata*—is a claw-footed fiend. It clings to blades of grass, to leaves of bush or tree, ready and eager to catch any beast, bird or man that may touch it.

At once it seeks a spot where it may bore in with a barbed beak. It draws on its bank for such juices as may be there. Like professional politicians, few die and none resign. Instead they suck sustenance from the body to which they are so attached, and they irritate. Again like some politicians, they are far more annoying when put from their post. For an itching, poisonous fester comes, to expel the beak they leave behind.

To shut out such seekers for place I wear drawers of close woven if comparatively light muslin, and to these are stitched a kind of over-stocking of the same cloth. The claw-footed devils can't get through.—EDWARD PERRY.

Dallas, Texas.

I noticed where one brother gave a chigger remedy. Texas is the land of the chigger and the following may be of interest to some one. Of course the chigger season is over just now, but it will soon be here again, and forewarned is forearmed.

FIRST, on the principal that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, before you go out in the fields or woods, rub some flowers of sulphur all over your body and the chiggers will religiously let you alone. However, if you do get them, rub a little potassium permanganate on said chigger and it will knock him galley west. Permanganate stains the skin a nasty looking reddish brown, like dried blood, but a few drops of a saturated solution of potassium metabisulphite will remove the stain instantly. In fact, in playing around with photography I use the two chemicals above mentioned because they remove stains of other solutions and leave the hands soft and white. I've never tried the permanganate remedy for chiggers myself, but I got it from an old-timer who uses it but bewails the stain. I, of course, put him hep to the remedy for the stain.

The last time I wrote to you it was from Fort Worth or Wichita Falls, I believe. I've been in Dallas a year now, and my feet are again itching to travel. Don't know where I'm going, but I'll soon be on my way. Somehow I can't stay very long in any one place. I've never lived in any city over three years (that was Philadelphia) and most of them a lot less than that. Luck to Adventure. Long may she wave!—E. H. BROWN.

Lakewood, New Jersey.

I went to chigger country some years ago for my health. I took a number of books on outdoor life along, not knowing what I'd meet. On chigger cures, I noticed all mentioned to rub with salt pork. I tried vaseline. As that did not have any effect, I tried salt, wetting it, rubbing it in and then washing it off by throwing water over myself, and had no further trouble.

Now I also used soap first, of course. Don't remember whether I tried salt alone as an experiment or not. Anyway, it worked fine just that way and seemed to be worth knowing.—A. A. A.

SOMETHING from Arthur D. Howden Smith in connection with his story in this issue:

"Swain's Folly" carries Swain's adventures in the turmoil of Norse politics during the third quarter of the Twelfth Century to the halfway point. He has failed in his endeavor to consolidate the country under King Ingi's rule, but as will be seen later, he has progressed considerably in creating the necessary sentiment in favor of a single powerful king, capable of controlling the great nobles. Undismayed by Ingi's death, he pushes ahead with his great project, with, this time, Erling's son Magnus as the chief pawn on the chess-board of events. And always in the background of his effort lurks the sinister figure of Olvir Rosta, who typifies the element of discord provided by the dwindling faction of the vikings.

The authorities for this period are the Saga of Sigurd, Ingi and Eystein, the Saga of Hakon Herdabreid and the Saga of Magnus Erling's son—all three included in Snorri Sturluson's "Heims Kringla." Most of the men who appear in the different tales are actual persons, and their characters and actions are always described as faithfully as the exigencies of the story plotting will permit. In no case is any great liberty taken with facts. It is scarcely necessary to say that the real Swain never figured in the Kings' Wars; he is, in this series, an imaginary character—an imaginary real character, if you will.

SEA-LIONS drive off killer whales. Has the interesting incident reported by this comrade any parallel?

As you will guess, this is an old letter from our cache. F. St. Mars is dead and, as already explained, the only stories of his we can get now are those previously published in England though not in this country.

By the way, it may be of interest to naturalists among you to know that some of his field-notes were recently being offered for sale.

Long Beach, California.

DEAR CAMP-FIRE FRIENDS: It is not my intention to criticize Mr. F. St. Mars or his story, "The Sea Wolf." It is merely that I have seen a thing that shows that the killer whale can be scared off by lesser beings than himself.

OFF the coast of California is San Maguiel Island. About a mile out from Maguiel is a double island called Flea Island. Here the big Stelar sea-lions make their home.

A few years ago it was my good fortune to be on Flea Island, taking pictures of the lions and their

young. They paid little attention to us. The greater part of the herd was out in the water. The mothers of those cubs who were old enough were teaching them to swim. (Yes, they have to teach the young ones to swim.)

Three large killer whales came toward the island at a tangent, swimming slowly, side by side, now above, now below the surface, but never going down far enough to submerge the dorsal fins.

WHEN the lions saw them they streaked it for the rocks, all of them clambering up on to a large shelf, from which point of safety they proceeded to tell the killers what they thought of them.

But there was one little cub—probably doing his first "solo"—who was out too far to get in with the others and found himself cut off. Three times the killers circled the island before they seemed to notice the baby sea-lion. Then they all rushed toward him at once, dived and came up under him. One of them grabbed him by the tail and flung him twirling, high into the air. When he came down they all rushed at him again, and again he went up in the air spinning. This was repeated several times.

In the meantime the mother was galloping up and down the shelf of rock behind the other sea-lions, scolding, biting and shoving, till she had forced the entire herd into the water. Now she swam behind them, forcing them on till they had covered about half the distance to the killers. Then, uttering a high pitched screaming roar, she forced herself to the front of the herd, when the whole herd charged, rolling the sea before them in a great smother of spray.

THE killers dived and came up way out to sea. The mother picked up her baby by the scruff of the neck and shook him, much in the same manner that I have seen a human mother shake her offspring when she has just pulled him out of the way of a street car.

Now the herd swam back to the rocks, all jabbering and talking it over among themselves and now and then turning to bark at the departing killers, for all the world like a pack of fox-terriers who have chased a bulldog down the street and are daring him to come back but are afraid that he will.

Trusting that the boys who sit round the Camp-Fire may find something of interest in this and particularly Mr. St. Mars, whose work I take as a text.—HENRY M. VAN DEPOELE.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom Larry Barretto rises to introduce himself (as a writer) on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. Most of you know him already through his four years here on our staff and need no introduction.

Lest any one get the idea, from Mr. Barretto's way of putting it, that he was fired from the staff, he wasn't. The success of his first book, "A Conqueror Passes," made it almost a duty for him to devote his time to writing. Except for that, I wish he were still on our staff. And except for the fact, that, being no longer on our staff, we can now buy stories from him. There is an office rule against buying stories written by any one on the staff.

The same is true, all the way through, in the case of L. Patrick Greene, except that his first book is "The Major—Diamond-Buyer." Both it and Larry Barretto's second book, "To Babylon," will be out by the time this reaches you. (Here's luck to both!) And Mr. Greene, too, has become a contributor to *Adventure*—or, I should say, has again become a contributor to *Adventure*. Plenty of you remember his stories in our pages before he joined our editorial staff. Indeed, it was our pages that first introduced *The Major* to the reading public.

I'M PROUD of that staff. If you want to know what kind they are, and don't already, judge from this. The first story Barretto sent us after leaving the magazine was handled by the staff as impersonally as if they'd never heard of him, though all of them were his friends, some of them his particular friends. All of them read it, to make doubly sure against any favorable bias. When they got through they talked it over and passed the story on to me with a negative vote—a perfectly good story but not the general type *Adventure* needed at that particular time. The story was rejected and was bought by another magazine.

No more than they ought to have done of course, but, well, that's the kind they are. They do what they ought to do. And "office politics" are unknown.

It makes me squirm sometimes when readers commend this or that in the magazine and seem to think all the credit belongs to me. It doesn't. Most emphatically it doesn't. I happen to be the editor, but I'm only one of seven men who do the work, very ably seconded by four girls in the next room. Not to mention the authors and artists:

It is not quite the simple thing I imagined it to be to write an introduction of myself to Camp-Fire. On consideration I find that there is appallingly little I can tell about myself and most of that little is uninteresting. However, I was born at Larchmont, New York, at a time when Queen Victoria, although old, was still firmly in the saddle, and this country was yet to know that Free Silver was an issue. It was a pretty bad period to be born in—that age of bell sleeves, wasp waists and bicycles, but in my thirty odd years I have managed to shed most of the prejudices I learned in the Victorian era.

My poor but proud parents decided that I was to be a banker, but Fate and a natural inability to add 3 and 2 decided otherwise, and after a wretched

period in Wall Street I was turned loose again to find a job. I found one—in fact I found one dozen or more in succession, but we'll draw the veil over that. They may have been good for me; they certainly were not pleasant. The range was wide—everything from opening packing cases in a publishing house (the literary instinct even then cropping out) to writing ads for cast iron sewer pipe.

THEN the war came along and I joined up—driving an ambulance in the French Army for eighteen months. It was over at last and I came home, not having been shot either for courage or cowardice, but with a well developed nostalgia that made life seem pretty tasteless. I hated war, but I hated peace worse.

A. S. H. gave me a job as one of the editors of *Adventure* and I remained on the staff for about four years. He and the magazine taught me all I know about writing, but this is only one of the reasons why I am just a bit more proud to appear in these pages than those of any other magazine published. I had a small celebration the day I sold this story to an argus-eyed staff who knew me too well.

In my third year on *Adventure* I wrote a novel and had it accepted, then a flock of short stories and sold most of them and then another novel. The staff may have felt it unbearable to have a writer always in their midst; at any rate A. S. H. gave me his blessing and sent me forth as a free lance.

In the meanwhile I had acquired a wife and had begun to save money, which is incredible but true.

AT THE present writing we are about to sail for France where I have a rendezvous with several battle-fields, long dead, but still alive for me. Also after six years' absence I have a yearning to see again the Boulevards of Paris and renew my acquaintance with the one thing that Broadway lacks—legally.

This story I have written did not happen, although it might have. The monument I mention stands near Buzancy dedicated to the Scotch thistles who died there, and soon I will return to the spot where Gus Mandell and others like him toiled up and up through the white mist and the hail of shells from the hill above. Having nothing but their courage and their lives, they gave magnificently of the one and tossed the other to the winds with open, careless hands. The Battle of Buzancy is an epic no man can adequately describe.—LARRY BARRETTO.

WE USUALLY "lay off of" poetry at Camp-Fire, because there are so many poets among us that, if we let them get started, those of us who can talk only in prose would never get heard at all. But after this comrade's experience in a "hole," he's entitled to talk poetry to us.

Note said experience and consider our boasted "civilization." Also our "land of liberty," "land of the free," etc. This is no unique case. It is common knowledge that the police can and do put citizens to the torture *on suspicion*. The law says "innocent till proved guilty," "no cruel and unusual punishments," etc., but the law doesn't worry these men hired to enforce the law. They practise this Middle Ages stuff and we continue to boast of our civilization and freedom.

Huntington Beach, California.

I was arrested once in a certain city for something I had nothing to do with and knew nothing about. However, the police thought differently and in their efforts to make me "talk" they put me in a "hole," a dungeon, painted black inside with no window or other light. The furniture consisted of an iron bucket with a tin lid, for a slop-jar. They also gave me a tin cup which held about a quart of water and this was filled twice daily. They took away my shoes, coat and hat, and left me there five days.

The first 48 hours I had nothing but water, after that I received a half loaf of bread each evening.

I would walk up and down the length of the cell, which was about 8 feet, until practically tired out, then sit on the bucket in a corner and sleep until I was nearly frozen, then up and walk some more. I have never tried to be at all literary, but while in there I composed a verse descriptive of the experience, if you can use it, "go to it."

The Hole

Within a dungeon's black, steel walls
  Upon the cold, steel floor
A prisoner sits asleep, and dreams,
  Awakes, shivers, sleeps and dreams some more.

He dreams of beefsteaks, ham and eggs,
  And all good things to eat,
Fairies bring in loads of things
  And lay them at his feet.

He sees a T-bone, nicely cooked
  With buttered toast and wines,
And fairy girlies by his side,
  To help him while he dines.

Cups of coffee, steaming hot
  A fairy to him brings,
He sees before his famished eyes
  A feast that's fit for kings.

He eats, and eats, and gets his fill,
  Nor does it cost a cent.
He then lights up a fine cigar,
  And is with life content.

When lo! the whistle loudly blows,
  He wakes, his dream is o'er,
The prisoners marching to their meals
  Go past, outside his door.

Then comes a guard, with noiseless tread,
  Bolts, in oiled sockets, slide,
A key is turned within a lock,
  The door swings open wide.

This is no feast they've brought to him
  Nor is it old champagne,
It's just plain water, in a cup,
  Then the door slams to again.—E. W. KAIN.

BY ALL means, let's abolish autos and bathing beaches. They kill more people than do firearms; if firearms are to be lawed against, why not these more murderous things?

Cincinnati, Ohio.

The greatest curse of America today is the superficial reasoning indulged in by the average citizen. And sad to say, the average newspaper seems to be afflicted with the same trouble.

THERE have been three or four cases of accidental shooting here recently and now a couple of newspapers are howling to High Heaven for anti-pistol laws, going on the assumption that pass the law and all will be well.

Why not be consistent and demand the abolishment of automobiles because a few fools kill people by their reckless driving, or, following the same line of reasoning, abolish the bathing-beaches because there were more people drowned here during the bathing season than were killed, either intentionally or otherwise, by firearms during the entire year?

Show me a man who loves firearms and enjays shooting and I will show you a man who is a real American and a good citizen. Hasn't this fellow as many rights as the motorist or the bather?

I know an old chap who is always prophesying dire evil to this country because the people don't think. Even while I smile at his gloomy prophecies, I have an uneasy feeling that maybe he isn't altogether wrong after all. *Quien sabel*—A. E. MARCUM.

A LETTER from Alan LeMay written after sending us his story that appears in this issue:

Aurora, Illinois.

Just happened to think of a point in my story, "Mustang Breed," that some people might think was peculiar.

IN THE story I have *Doughfoot Wilson* carry an injured person in *front of him*, instead of back of the saddle, the natural place, where there's plenty of room. The reason is that many a well-broken horse is sensitive about weight on his loins, and won't stand for it for a moment. I'm thinking now of half a dozen horses I've ridden that you could start kettling any time by just resting your hand back of the saddle. The horse I ride nearly every day, right now, is that way—and he's as gentle and honest an old pony as you'd want to find.

So, if I were riding a strange horse, that I'd just had a big bother with, and wanted to pick up somebody that was already hurt, I wouldn't take any chances with the back of the saddle stuff, even though carrying in front is mighty awkward.

The natural way to pick up somebody that needs picking up in a hurry is just to let him have the crook of your arm at the gallop, and he swings up behind easily, without the horse slackening pace. But horses are very particular about anything that feels strange or different.

I GUESS every one that rides knows this stuff, and those that are conservative, like *Doughfoot*, would do the same. But a man takes an awful chance in writing Western stuff; there are so many ways of doing things, in different sections, that it's pretty easy to make a bad impression on some cowman that's always been used to seeing things some other way than the way the writer has told it.

Take the subject of gun toting: In lots of places now-in cow country a man is pretty conspicuous if he wears a gun right out, since there's no fighting to speak of any more. But in other places the smoke-wagon is still considered a part of regular equipment; many times a dismounted man in the company of wild steers is in very serious difficulties if he is unarmed. And I have heard of cases where a thrown rider, with his foot caught in the stirrup, has saved himself by killing a horse that would have dragged him to death in short order.

So I am naturally a little skittish about points that might seem odd to some one who has every reason to know what he's talking about better than I do—maybe. But when these sharpshooters write in to say "there's no such thing"—well, as Whiskers says, "they sure are coverin' a pile of ground."—ALAN LEMAY.

THIS 1922 letter from our cache tells us about a white buffalo and fears a wrong impression may arise from a former story by Hugh Pendexter—as to the location of the Black Hills. At this date I can't remember the point, but Mr. Pendexter has proved he knows very well where the Black Hills are and any wrong impression must have arisen from unclearness or misinterpretation.

As a matter of fact, Hugh Pendexter has got on my nerves. How many books of his have we read and through how many years? Yet his record for historical accuracy is practically spotless. And if any bunch of readers in the world has proved itself able and ready to catch up slips, of this kind it's our bunch around Camp-Fire.

Ft. Pierre, South Dakota.

In the May tenth, 1922, issue of *Adventure*, I saw an article by Frank H. Huston headed "The White Buffalo" and that the last authentic information on white buffalo was from the vicinity of Ft. Keough, Montana.

NOW if Mr. Huston or any one else would like to hear more of our white buffaloes, I will look it up as we have the largest individual herd of buffaloes in the United States, right here in the central part of South Dakota, the buffalo ranch being located seven or eight miles up the Missouri River from Fort Pierre, South Dakota, and the capitol of South Dakota is just across the Big Muddy. The best river crossing in the State is on the Black and Yellow trail between Pierre and Ft. Pierre. The trail runs right by the buffalo pasture and tourists are welcome to come in and see them.

Mr. Stanley Phillips is in charge of the ranch and is a fine young American, being one-fourth blood Sioux Indian. His father, Scottie Phillips, was ex-Senator and a very prominent man in early days and is still well remembered, though he has been in the happy hunting ground for some time.

Sorry to say that some —— fool rancher or sod-buster shot this white buffalo and when it was found it was too late to save the hide. A white buffalo is very rare. Some of our old Indians tell me they have heard of white buffalo, but this is the only one they have ever seen, for they claim that it is hardly likely that you will see more than one in a hundred years.

NOW here is something that looks like a misprint to me or may be I don't understand it. In Mr. Henderter's story, "Pay Gravel," the way the gist of the first of the stories grows, leads one to think that the Black Hills are in Nebraska.

I don't want to claim any credit for South Dakota that is not coming to her, but I do want South Dakota to get all the credit that is due her and is coming to her.

The only gold rush I ever heard of that was in the Black Hills was in South Dakota, and Rapid City, Deadwood and Lead are all in South Dakota. The Black and Yellow Trail that I spoke of is partly the old original Deadwood trail from Fort Pierre to Deadwood.

This letter can be published in Camp-Fire if Your Honor sees fit, but what I would like to see mostly is to give South Dakota credit for the Black Hills Gold Rush, as South Dakota has the richest one hundred square miles in the United States, maybe the world.—J. R. SUNDE.

OUR old friend the rope-trick again. A 1922 letter drawn from the cache—Eugene Cunningham of our writers' brigade:

San Francisco, California.

Dolores Leiden's assertions, in commenting upon the explanations advanced by Mr Besson and myself, of the "Hindu rope-trick," were so radically opposed to what little I've heard or read of mesmerism and hypnotism that I'm interested.

Our woman comrade states flatly that a group can't be hypnotized "in that length of time unless they (1) understand the laws of hypnotism, (2) know they are going to be hypnotized, (3) do almost as much for themselves to reach a cataleptic condition as the performer does for them."

As written these arbitrary pronouncements fail to convince me. I have always nursed the idea that hypnotic influence depends largely, if not wholly, upon the relative strength of will of operator and subject; and that ignorance of the laws of hypnotism, instead of rendering one immune to the influence, works to the contrary.

JUST this evening I heard another account of the "rope-trick," coming from a man I consider trustworthy, who heard an eye-witness of the performance (whom my friend considers reliable) describe it. The details were as we know them. But this witness (a chief gunner's mate, U. S. N.) remarked, somewhat apologetically, that "a man took pictures of the performance, but got in trouble on the grounds, was killed and his camera disappeared, so I could never figure out how the stunt was done."

This witness also told of a companion-trick, where the performer rushed before the spectators carrying a ladder. He halted "*with a loud cry that attracted all eyes to him*," then climbed the ladder, stepped off (into, or upon, the air, understood), shouldered the ladder and walked away (still on thin air)!

KIPLING, of course, isn't a scientist. But a lot of us believe that he knows India from inside out. Now, in "Kim," Chapter IX, pages 242 245, is the description of *Lurgan's* attempt to hypnotize *Kim*, with *Lurgan's* warning against the methods of hypnotists—in India, of course. Certainly, *Kim* knew nothing of hypnotism nor desired to be hypnotized, nor expected to be. By repetition of the multiplication-table he escaped, but was half-hypnotized, at that. *Lurgan* was astonished at *Kim's* escape.

Again, in "The Finest Story in the World," a babu wanted to make *Charlie* gaze into "the ink pool," saying, " . . . he would be most good to make see things . . . he could see anything that a man could see . . . ' And *Charlie* knew nothing of hypnotism; was not to know the babu's intention. Point: Was Kipling—as the text implies—mentioning a well-known hypnotic process, "the ink-pool," or merely romancing? Never having been in India, I don't know. But I've seen some queer happenings in queer corners; I'll believe almost anything.

AS A layman, interested in hypnotism as in any other out-of-the-ordinary topic, I would have been more impressed by Miss (?) Leiden's very final abolishment of the "group-mesmerism" theory in these cases had she quoted in support of her contentions some authorities whom I might have verified, or informed us as to her own qualifications in these subjects.

Meaning, "*puramente*," that I'd like to know whether she's just another dabbler, advancing her personal opinions and conjectures, or an expert on hypnotism and mesmerism, stating well known principles. If the latter, then as a confessed know-nothing, I'm squelched—acknowledge receipt of light and all that. But if the former—then I'll hold to my own opinions, which seem to me satisfyingly logical.—EUGENE CUNNINGHAM.

DON'T forget that it has been necessary for us to discontinue the auction of used cover paintings. Most of them are returned to the artists. Readers interested in cover originals may get in touch with the artists by writing them in our care.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts

QUESTIONS should be sent not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4—6. Islands and Coasts. In Three Parts.
7—8. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
9. Australia and Tasmania
10. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
11. New Guinea
12. Philippine Islands
13. Hawaiian Islands and China
14. Japan
15—18. Asia. In Four Parts
19 26. Africa. In Eight Parts
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28. Asia Minor
29—31. Balkans. In Three Parts.
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Health-Building Outdoors
Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada
Herpetology
Entomology
Standing Information

Amazon River Blowguns

IF YOU own one hold on to it for real money:

Request:—"I have quite a collection of weapons but no blowguns. Have you any idea where a fellow could get a specimen in this country; any dealer who might have one?

Have you any pictures of your collection? If you have and will please send me prints I will gladly pay whatever you wish for them."—MART F. HIGGINS, San Bernardino, Calif

Reply, by Mr. MacCreagh:—I am sorry that I can't help you in the matter of blowguns. Amazon River guns are apparently quite rare. So I have been told by the Museum of the American Indian, the authorities of which were most appreciative of the collection I presented to them.

I don't know of any dealer who might have one for sale. You see, I am not in the collecting business. I bring back only what I can get hold of when I am away on a trip, and give everything to the museum—with the exception of a few pieces which I keep for the decoration of my walls.

Neither have I any photographs of a blowgun. Sorry.

It might be possible to get you a blowgun by writing to friends in Manaos on the Amazon River, who might get in touch with up-river traders, and so acquire a gun. But it would take a long time and would be uncertain as well as expensive.

If you would care to name a sum which you would be prepared to pay for such a curio, I would write and see what could be done. But I am sure the thing would cost much more than it would be worth, owing to the trouble and danger involved in getting a specimen. Twenty or thirty dollars at least.

Sorry I can't help you any better than this.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

New York to Colorado by Auto

HARD-WON hints from a man who's made the trip from coast to coast:

Request:—"Am thinking of taking an auto trip across country in a Ford five-passenger touring car. Party to consist of middle-aged man (only driver) and wife, their daughter and five-year-old child.

Information desired on the following subjects:

Best route from New York City to Palisade, Colo., to include some places of interest *en route* without delaying trip too much.

Probable cost of trip for running car, etc., and necessary extra parts. Approximate time for trip. Necessary cooking and camping equipment. Possible difficulties to encounter?

A would-be adventurer in the great outdoors."—Mae Petersen, West New York, N. J.

Reply, by Mr. R. E. Spears:—My suggestions regarding auto tours are always subject to varying conditions, of course. Palisade is on the Grand River in western Colorado. Kremmling is as near as I have been to it, west of the Rockies; but I drove from Raton, N. Y., through Trinidad, Pueblo, Colorado Springs, Denver into Cheyenne, Wyo., last spring. And thence to New York, and back again over Lincoln Highway. I think your best route would be either one of these two.

New York, west on the Lincoln Highway. This gives you probably the most historical route. You might find a slight advantage in better roads, going up Hudson River to Albany and west on Chicago-New York (White-Red-White) trail, hitting Lincoln at Ligonier, Ind. Either route would be good In bad weather, rains, remember that the Albany-Buffalo-Chicago-Clinton (Iowa) route is all stone paved.

Go to Cheyenne, Wyo. Thence down to Colorado Springs and follow trail (Ocean to ocean and Pike's Peak *via* Buena Vista, Leadville, Glenwood Springs, Newcastle) down Grand River to Palisades. You'll find a wonderful journey through mountains west from Colorado Springs.

But better take advice at Cheyenne; you might perhaps come down through Laramie, Medicine Bow Mountains, Walden, Kremmling (a town that sold me kerosene instead of gasoline) and thence follow Midland Trail all way down Grand River to Palisades.

I went through Denver, by Idaho Springs over Berthoud Pass into Kremmling. Another party went through Georgetown instead of Berthoud Pass, down to the Midland Trail. It all depends on conditions prevailing when you get to the Rockies, which road is best. Also on the season. Summer trip advisable; Rockies impassable in winter. And early autumns and late springs.

You can't go amiss for scenery or interest. There is no way of estimating the wonder of a trip over the Rockies.

We drove from coast to coast with a Studebaker in 1919; put on three new tires—$180; tore out gears and had a lot of bad repairs; total cost about $450. In a Franklin, $165. This for four persons. The Ford goes across for from $40 to $100 cost of car; depends on condition of car and the trouble encountered. Total cost to Palisade, say $150 to $200.

We found but little difference in trip cost if we ate in restaurants, "regular dinner," daily. And then lunches. Cooking a meal takes about two hours. Eating in restaurant saves more than an hour—and that hour means twenty to thirty miles traveling. Saves a day in every six or eight days.

Your cooking equipment: A nesting aluminum set is most economical in space—Aluminum Cooking Utensils Co., New Kensington, Penn., for catalog; or you can make up an outfit for favorite dishes. Frying-pan, two or three pails or kettles to cook in, tableware, and pack these things in some one container, convenient to get at.

Blanket for each one—woolen. Canvas to spread on ground—tarp is best, 16 ft. by 7 ft. 6 in., 8 or 10 ounce canvas. If you waterproof this sheet of canvas it will wrap three of you up and tuck you in, and cold wind won't bother you—sleeping on ground. Takes about ten days to grow accustomed to camping.

American Gas Machine Co., Albert Lea, Minn., for Kampkook gasoline stove (standard model used by most tourists), two burner.

Ask National Survey, Chester, Vt., for list of maps. $2 map, book form, of U. S., about most useful of kind I've seen. You can make trip in 20 to 30 days.

Difficulties? Some rough roads. Rain is depressing—don't travel in mud. Wait for it to dry up. Camp early; eat before dark.

Don't go too far in a day. More than 100 miles at first, without frequent rests, wearies one. We found it paid to loaf along, stopping at good places to rest an hour or so, especially for two boys. Later you'll make it up as you grow used to it. Overdoing is the biggest difficulty. Come again if I can help further.

The Samoas

WHERE copra comes from—copra being dried cocoanut meat:

Request:—"There are two of us, healthy men, used to active outdoor lives, and we are thinking of settling somewhere in the South Seas.

Our idea is to buy or lease a piece of land sufficient to support us in fair comfort and provide a modest living. We have been advised that Samoa is a good place for our purpose.

Is it, or is there some other place you would advise instead?

Can one buy or lease land there?

How much land would we need to make say $1,500 a year clear?

What is the minimum capital we should have to start there?

What crops should we plant?

How is the climate for whites?

How are the natives?

Any insect pests?

Any dangerous reptiles or diseases?

Shall be grateful for any general information or indicated sources of information.

I do not want my name to appear in connection with these questions."—H. B., Eureka, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Mills:—As you have Samoa on your minds, why not ask at the head office in Washington regarding American Samoa? There should be land to lease thereon for Americans. I know there are leases to be acquired in the adjoining Samoan islands that are now under the mandate of the New Zealand government. Some of the estates that were run by Germans before the N. Z. Expeditionary Force took the islands from Kaiser Bill immediately that now deposed monarch declared war, are at this very moment being put up to tender for leasing.

You might have a shot by writing to the Administrator, Samoan Group, Apia, South Sea Islands. You can add in your letter that I advised you to write to him; that is, to General Richardson, the said Administrator, a fine chap. If you ask him, or your own Washington office about the islands, I have no doubt you will receive some printed dope I'm enclosing some myself from *Adventure's* printery.

Generally only leaseholds are obtainable in the worth-while islands. It is too hard for me to say what area of land will meet a given return or what amount of capital you require. You'll need a few thousand dollars to see you through the waiting-for-something-to-turn-up period.

The climates of most of the islands are good for whites. Of course, the tropics are debilitating, but that is overcome by a spell into colder climes every four years.

Coconuts for copra are the principal plantations, but coffee is grown, and cotton, I think, is going to be good business. The natives are friendly. Fairly free from reptiles and diseases.

The Continental Code

WHAT every international radio man ought to know:

Request:—"Where could I purchase a map or maps of steamship routes—showing all important reefs, lights, shoals, etc., so that hearing a ship's position reported, I could locate her instantly?

Also where could I get books on the study of Continental Code? I can transmit quite fast but can not seem to be able to receive at all, except a letter here and there. I have asked several people where I could locate such a book, but all they seem to understand about is blue prints of plexes, dynes, etc. I've got plenty of books on theory. I want a code instruction book."—BERTRAM HANSCOM.

Reply, by Mr. McNicol:—The only place you can get a map such as you desire is from the Hydrographic Office, Department of Commerce, Washington.

Your difficulty with the code is the same as is experienced by every fellow who becomes an operator. All students can send pretty well long before they can receive. The only thing to do is to continue practising on the key. As you practise sending, you are at the same time gaining in ability to receive.

There are very few books such as you desire. The best one I know of costs but one dollar, entitled "I. C. S. Handbook for Radio Operators" for sale by International Correspondence Schools, Scranton, Penna. From page 411 onward you will find good dope on receiving.

Aztec Weapons

CORTEZ, the conqueror of Mexico, didn't have such an easy time of it after all.

Request:—"I would like to have you give me the following information as to the early Mexicans—Aztecs, I believe they were.

1. What kind of arms did these Indians use before the coming of the Spaniards?

2. Did they have cattle and other domesticated animals?

3. Is it true that they were cannibals?

4. Where can I obtain the best book on same; I mean as to their habits, customs, etc.?"—GUY W. BROWN, Vallejo, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Mahaffey:—The offensive weapons of the Aztecs consisted of bows and arrows, slings, clubs, spears, light javelins and swords, and in the use of these the soldiers were all skilled. The bows were made of tough, elastic wood, and were about five feet in length. For strings they used the sinews of animals or stag's hair twisted. The arrows were of light cane, with about six inches of oak or other hard wood inserted in the end; at the extremity a piece of *itzli* (obsidian) was fastened with henequen fiber and further secured with a paste of resin or other adhesive substance.

Sometimes instead of *itzli* they used the bones of animals or fish; the bone of a fish called *tibisa* is said to have caused by its venomous properties a wound very difficult to heal. It is well known that the Nahua nations did not use poisoned arrows; such weapons would have defeated the object for which they often fought, namely that of taking their enemies alive for the purpose of sacrificing them upon the altars of their gods.

It is reasonable to believe that many of them attained great accuracy in shooting with the bow, but there is room to doubt the assertion that they were able to shoot with three or four arrows at a time or to throw an ear of corn into the air and pierce every kernel before it reached the ground or to throw up

a coin the size of a half dollar and keep it in the air as long as they pleased with their arrows.

The sling was a braid of *pita* thread or other fiber, broader in the middle than at the ends, with which the stones were thrown with much force and accuracy; the missiles were in a pouch filled with stones and carried suspended from the waist in front. The *maza* was a club similar to the Roman *clava*, tapering from the handle toward the end and terminating in a knotty head filled with points of *itzli* or tempered copper.

The *macana* or *macua-huitl*, called by the Spaniards *espada* or sword, was made of tough wood, about three and a half feet long, with a flat blade, four fingers in width armed on both sides with sharp pieces of *itzli* about three fingers long by three wide, which were inserted into the grooved edge at intervals and cemented with some adhesive compound. This weapon when not in immediate use was carried slung to the arm with a cord. Many of these swords were two-handed and very heavy, and it is asserted that with one of them an Aztec warrior could at one blow cut a man in two or sever a horse's head.

The Mexican spears were very strong and were pointed with *itzli* or copper. Spears were the principal weapons used by the Zapotecs and other tribes of Oaxaca. The *tlacochtli* or Mexican javelin was like a long arrow made of *ollati* or bamboo; the point was usually hardened in the fire or armed with *itzli*, copper or bone; many had three points, thus inflicting a very severe wound. They were hurled with great force, and had a cord attached, so that when thrown they could be recovered for another cast. Some writers mention a ballesta as being used to launch the javelins, but no definite information is found regarding this.

When the Chichimecs first settled in the Valley of Mexico the only weapons were the bow and arrow and blowpipe, in the use of which they were very expert. The blowpipe was a long hollow tube through which clay pellets were projected, and it is said that with this weapon the Chichimecs could kill a bird or beast at a moderate distance; afterward this weapon came to be supplanted by other weapons and was used only for shooting small birds.

Among other things, Cortez was presented by Montezuma with a dozen blowpipes beautifully ornamented and painted with figures of birds and animals; the mouthpiece of each was made of gold five or six inches long; they were also ornamented in the center with gold, and accompanying them were gold network bags or pouches in which to carry the clay pellets.

2. There were no domestic animals such as sheep, cattle, goats, horses or burros among the Indians of Mexico until these were introduced by the Spaniards. Wild hogs were abundant but were never domesticated.

3. According to the most reliable authorities on Mexico, the Aztecs were cannibals, but ate only the bodies of their enemies during religious ceremonies.

4. The most authoritative work on the customs and so forth of the Aztecs and other Indian nations of Mexico is found in Bancroft's "Native Races of the Pacific States" in five volumes. Perhaps the Vallejo Public Library has this work; if so you will find a great deal of information regarding the Indians from Central America to Alaska.

Trapping the Olympics

SURE-THING sets for mink, fisher, marten:

Request:—"I am taking advantage of *Adventure's* service for information concerning trapping possibilities in the Olympic Peninsula.

I am quite green at the game as I have trapped only one season. This was in the Rockies, and the catch was confined to cats, coyotes and mink.

What I want to know is what fur-bearing animals, if any, inhabit the Olympic Mountains and the type of trap best adapted to this country.

Supposedly the country is almost inaccessible, and if you can suggest how to approach it you may save a lot of grief. Suggesting books on log-cabin architecture and trapping methods for the kind of animals that infest this region would also help.

I have heard that there is a great deal of mineral in this country—what kind of mineral?

If this letter is published please omit my name."—— ——, Bremerton, Wash.

Reply, by Mr. Harriman:—You can expect to find cougar, coyotes, bobcats, foxes, maybe lynx, perhaps black bear, mink, marten and fisher; in the foot-hills 'coon, weasels and skunks.

Get in touch with the rangers and ask them about ways of getting into the Olympics. If any one knows the trails they do.

I never heard of a book on log-cabin architecture, though some few give a few details about building them. You must get a permit from the rangers, price five dollars, before you cut a tree; and then you must pay stumpage rates for the lumber in the trees you cut.

Marten will be found only in high places, among the trees. The fisher haunts creeks and pokes into every hole and under every overhanging bank. Under these banks is the place to set your traps for fisher. In the stream for mink. It takes skill to catch either one. It is possible to make a set for mink or fisher that will surely get them if they are near.

To get a mink cut two short logs six inches thick. Lay them in a stream, across the current, with tops above water. Set a trap in each end of space, with logs eight inches apart. Set stake in middle and on it put a dead bird, sprinkled with Biggs' Liquid Bait. It is deadly.

For fisher, hide two or three traps under overhanging bank, with bait in middle, sprinkled with Liquid Bait.

For marten, use tree trap, fastened to limb or leaning trunk, and a dead bird hanging above trap.

E. W. Biggs, Kansas City, Mo., is the fairest fur-buyer I know. He sells liquid bait of all kinds that doubles the catch.

Skunk are easily taken by using his bait, whole families being caught at one set, the survivors coming back each night. Skunk are valuable now.

People like to talk about the great amount of mineral in the Olympics, but nobody has found it yet in paying amounts. Just some slight indications, that is all, according to Washington's own book on resources of the State. In some parts the State has coal-mines.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Tripping the Yellowstone-Mississippi

HAVE you heard of a great stream under its double alias of Rocky River and Sandy River:

Request:—"Having been a rover from my youth up, I don't wonder the *Wanderlust* has again got me by the hind legs. I have been here quietly since I was let out of the Naval Reserve in 1919, after the close of the war; but, now being in ill health and nervous breakdown threatening, I have been advised a change of climate and scenery is the one thing that will give me relief. Unfortunately I lack means to travel in Pullmans, or first cabins at sea, or even the steerage, but I do possess a superannuated lizzy of the vintage of 1915 but in good running order, also necessary nautical books and instruments, also a kit of carpenter's and machinist's tools and the ability to use them. Under these circumstances I have long planned a trip that would well be worth while, and here is the gist of it. I would travel by lizzy to the nearest point of Yellowstone or Missouri River from which uninterrupted boat navigation can be had downstream. Here I would dismantle the car and build a seaworthy dory, about 20x6x 2½, cut out two cylinders of the engine and install in dory, together with numerous other articles out of the car, as lights, steering wheel, cushions, etc.

I would also install two masts with handy leg-of-mutton sails as the principal means of locomotion, using only gasoline occasionally when needed. Then proceed downstream to New Orleans, Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean Sea, Colon, Panama, San Pedro, San Francisco, back to Vallejo—roughly speaking about 8,000 miles or more. I would have to leave New Orleans at about the middle of October after the close of the hurricane season there.

Now I would say the seagoing part of the program is the part I really know something about, so we will let that pass for the time being. What I want is information about the river-navigation:

Which is the point highest up on either the Yellowstone or Missouri Rivers from which boats, drawing no more than eighteen inches of water, can with reasonable safety navigate, without portages?

How can this point be reached by auto from California?

As all motor boats have to be registered at a custom house, where would I have to apply for registry when building a boat at this point; or in other words, which custom house has jurisdiction up at heads of these rivers?

I have heard a great many things about river pirates. Is there anything to it?

Where can comprehensive maps of the rivers be procured?

Any general information about the rivers, fishing, hunting, camping, etc., will be thankfully received."—JOHN F. ROSENLIND, Vallejo, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Zerr:—I really enjoyed your letter; it was a lot of information in itself. Also glad that you are not asking me in regard to your trip after passing out of the Mississippi River, as I always have been against—permit me to say—a foolhardy venture, and especially in such a boat. And then your resourcefulness in regard to its construction and equipment: Really, I must congratulate you.

In regard to the trip overland: Why not consult a good road map, or ask any auto club?

The Yellowstone is not navigable, at least not without portaging; but the head of navigation on the Missouri is at Fort Benton. The season extends from March to December. It is a shifting stream; many snags; caving banks; carries much sediment, destroying land by erosion. Swift current and steep slope for such a large stream. Slope from the mouth to the Yellowstone is 0.84 feet per mile in a distance of 1,760 miles with a width of 1,000 to 1,200 feet; from the Yellowstone to Fort Benton, 524 miles, the fall is 1.4 feet per mile; width 800—1,000 feet. The elevation at the mouth is 397.5 feet and at Fort Benton 2,616 feet. Length from Fort Benton to the mouth, 2,285 miles; mouth of the Red River 860 miles and to New Orleans 214 miles. Government boats *McPherson*, *Missouri* and *Mandan* are engaged on the Missouri, and they will help in information.

The current on the Mississippi River at normal stage is about 2½ miles per hour. The Missouri from Fort Benton to Carroll, 160 miles, is known as the Rocky River and to Sioux City as the Sandy River on account of its bottom.

I never heard of charts of the Missouri River. The Government Lighthouse Book on that stream shows only locations from Kansas City to the mouth, a distance of 390 miles. In regard to charts of the Mississippi River, write to Secretary Mississippi River Commission, 1311 International Life Building, St. Louis, Mo. The scale of their sounding sheets, one mile to the inch, 89 in the set, costs 26 cents each; total $23.14.

In regards to a license. As long as you are not carrying passengers for hire, you need no registry or license.

As to river pirates, they are everywhere, even in a large city; it's just a case of being prepared and keeping a sharp look out.

As to fishing and hunting, if you have time write to the Secretary of Agriculture, or inquire along the way. You ought to make the trip from Vallejo to Fort Benton in about a month, starting say April, get there in May, leave about June and you'll get to New Orleans about the middle of July or August.

Won't you drop me a line on your way down the river?

I might help you along; at any rate I'm here to answer questions.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Songs for Lone Splendor

"WATCHING with eternal lids apart,
Like Nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priest-like task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores:"

Request:—"I am decided to spend a year on an uninhabited island in the Caribbean Sea to pursue several of my fondest studies in peace—alone. I depend on its having fresh water and supplying my fish needs. Might I hope it would give me fruit and perhaps birds or any small game?

Please withhold my name and address should you publish this note.

Do you know of a small island in the Caribbean

Sea, cut off from shipping, and uninhabitated, owned by one who would probably permit me to live there for a year?

From what final port would I embark for my island?

Can you approximate the cost of passage—special; one way—from the last port to my island? My equipment will weigh six hundred pounds. I want to keep within one hundred dollars for this last leg of the voyage.

What diseases should I take precaution against? Which medicines should I take with me, in addition to castor oil and quinine?

Am I likely to find an island such as I describe, these days? If not in the Caribbean, then where?

Can you name some books that deal with my queries?"—O. G.

Reply, by Capt. Dingle:—Uninhabited islands which are inhabitable are not easy to come across. I have found, except in the remotest seas, that where life is possible life is found, if only by way of occasional visits. Turtle fishermen, salt gatherers, wood cutters, sponge fishermen, these all very soon spot out places where wood and water may be had, and most such places are visited at least fairly often.

And when you say "cut off from shipping" you must surely be taking your own boat. I know of no such place in the Atlantic. There are bits of mainland which would fill your needs, however, and you could keep as far as you liked from your fellows, and at the same time be in reach if you felt like going mad or water gave out or grub failed.

There may be islets in some of the Pacific groups that would meet your requirements. There are other sections of "Ask Adventure" covering the Pacific. So far as my knowledge extends, the Bahamas offer your best chance in the Caribbean, and that chance is by no means great. I suggest you write to J. S. Johnson & Co., Merchants, Nassau, Bahamas, who own many small islands and may be able to offer you something. They also own land on Andros, the largest island, which I had in mind when I said there were places on a mainland. You can get almost any sort of hermitage you seek on Andros.

Accompany your inquiry with stamped, self-addressed envelop.

Jobs for Machine Gunners

SOUTH AMERICA can use quite a few of 'em:

Request:—"In regard to an expert machine gunner enlisting in the army of some South American republic: I am to be discharged from the U. S. Army soon and would like to try that country for a while.

Could you answer the following questions for me?

Are Americans accepted for enlistment in the armies of the countries you cover?

What country has the most modernly equipped army?

How would one address a letter to reach the War Departments of the various countries in your territory; or to whom would one write to get more detailed information on this subject?"—EDWARD J. CARPENTER, Fort Bliss, Tex.

Reply, by Mr. Young:—There is a chance of an American machine gunner enlisting in any of the South American armies; in fact you will already find a few in all of the armies, with the possible exception of Paraguay and Bolivia. These are usually hired after they drift in and meet personally some of the Government officials of the country. There has just been a little fracas in Brazil, and I feel sure you would have caught on had you been there at the time it was going on. The way most of us got into the armies was when something was doing in the fighting line.

It might be a good plan to write to the consuls of such countries as Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Chile and ask them if they can refer you to the proper people in their countries to whom to write. Otherwise it is a game of drifting down and catching on where something is doing.

Chile has the best trained army, and Argentina is a close second. Peru and Brazil have about the same sort of army, quite a bit of feathers and lace but not one fourth as efficient as the Chileans, who are the toughest, hardest, fightingest race in the world.

Write Pan American Union, Washington, D. C. for booklets covering the countries you are especially interested in.

Tuna-Fishing in the Hawaiians

WHERE they hold the world's record:

Request—"Would appreciate it greatly if you would give me such information as you have regarding the hunting and fishing in the Hawaiian Islands. I have been ordered there for a three-year tour of duty and am over anxious to get some information as to hunting and fishing there."—G. A. O'CONNELL, Major, Medical Corps, Fort Sill, Okla.

Reply, by Mr. Halton:—Hawaiian waters teem with fishes in infinite variety of color and form, and there is splendid fishing in the island waters.

The Hawaii Tuna-Fishing Club of Honolulu offers exceptional facilities to the angler in reaching the famous game-fishing grounds, and under its direction the sport has been brought into national prominence. The world's record for tuna catches was made in Hawaiian waters by Jump of Los Angeles. The Tuna Club now has a well equipped rendezvous at Kihei on the island of Maui, while similar fishing is accessible from Honolulu, Kaleiwa, Hilo, Kailua and Waimea. Among the game fish are the yellow and blue fin tuna, ono, ulua and swordfish.

There are deer and wild goats as well as game birds to be hunted.

"ASK ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address J. D. NEWSOM, *Adventure*, New York.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

FOR such readers as still remember and love the old ballads, now practically forgotten, I print two versions of one of the most popular of them, "Barbara Allen," that have recently been sent in to the department. Both versions have suffered somewhat in the process of oral transmission, but the changes that have taken place are of considerable interest to students of folk-song. I give them without editorial change—just as they came to me.

To those unacquainted with the music, the printed texts will seem crude. A great part of the effectiveness of the old ballads was to be found in the tunes to which they were sung; and in the voice of the singer; they were never intended for print. Fortunate are those who learned to love them in the days gone by.

Johnny Greene.

(Text contributed by Mr. Chas. P. Lynch, as found among his mother's papers. Written down prior to 1885.)

It was early, early in the spring
When the green buds were a-swelling,
Young Johnny Greene from a Northern country
Fell in love with Barbara Allen.

Young Johnny Greene was taken very sick,
He lay in low condition;
And all he could say both night and day
Was, "Send for Barbara Allen."

Slowly, slowly, she walked along,
And slowly she came nigh him;
And all she could say when she came there
Was, "Young man, I think you are a-dying."

"Oh yes, my pretty little miss,
I am in low condition;
And one sweet kiss would comfort me,
Hard-hearted Barbara Allen."

"Oh, don't you remember the long summer's day,
When around the table seated,
You drank the health to all around
And slighted Barbara Allen?"

He turned his pale face to the wall
And death soon crept around him.
"Adieu, adieu, to all fair maids
But woe to Barbara Allen."

As she was walking over the fields
The death bell she heard ringing,
And the more it rang it seemed to say,
"Hard-hearted Barbara Allen."

She looked to the east, she looked to the west,
She spied a corpse come flying;
"Come sit you down, you corpse of clay,
That I may look upon you."

She looked upon the corpse of clay
And then she fell to smiling,
And all her friends cried out, "For shame!
Hard-hearted Barbara Allen."

"Oh mother, mother, make my shroud,
And make it long and narrow,
For Johnny Greene died yesterday
And I shall die tomorrow."

Barbary Ellen.

(Text of De Forrest E. Hall)

Sweet William came from a farer land
Where rosebuds were a-swelling;
He fell in love, yes, fell in love,
With a girl named Barbary Ellen.

He was taken sick, yes, very sick;
He says, "I wish I had some little one
To run the way to Ellen,
To run the way to Ellen town,
And bring me Barbary Ellen."

They said, "Your uncle's got some little ones
To run the way to Ellen,
To run the way to Ellen town,
And bring you Barbary Ellen."

They ran and they ran till they could not run,
Until they reached her dwelling,
They said, "Your master's sick and sent for you
(If) your name be Barbary Ellen."

Quickly she got her coat and hat,
And then she left her dwelling.
"My master's sick and sent for me,
My name be Barbary Ellen."

"Do you remember the other day
When you were all a-drinkin',
You drank your health to the ladies all around
And slighted Barbary Ellen?"

He turned his pale face to the wall
And his back to the friends all around him.
"Farewell, farewell, to the friends all around;
Be kind to Barbary Ellen."

Slowly, slowly she turned 'round
And started back to her dwelling,
But before she had reached half way
She heard his death bells tolling.

And when at last she reached her home
With eyes that were red from crying,
She says, "Hand me down those corpse' of clay,
And let me gaze upon them."

Sweet William died on a Saturday,
And Barbary Ellen on Sunday;
The parents died for the loss of them both,
And buried on eve of Monday.

Sweet William's buried in the old churchyard,
And Barbary Ellen in the choir;
And out of his grave there grew a deep red rose,
And out of hers a briar.

They grew and they grew till they could not grow,
Till they could not grow any higher;
Then they wrapped and tied a true love's knot—
The red rose and the briar.

LOUIS SHEPARD, who has been a frequent contributor to the department, asks if any reader can help him complete the following song. There are supposed to be about ten verses.

We went to Arizona
To chase the Indians there,
But never an Indian did we see,—
And we never lost a hair.

We laid down in the ditches,
In the dirty yellow mud,
But never an Indian did we see,—
Or a turnip, or a spud.

Along the telegraph wires
We skipped to Mexico,
And we blessed the day we got away
From the Regular Army O.

SEND all contributions of old songs, and all questions about them, direct to R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Massachusetts. DO NOT send them to the magazine.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MARCH 20TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and the **two complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

NATIVE BORN — ***Barry Soobee***
Rum runners without a country.

FOWL TACTICS — ***Douglas Oliver***
Ducks are scarce in the A. E. F.

THE BUSH LOPERS A Five-Part Story Part III
Carcajou uses his wits in the service of France. — ***Hugh Pendexter***

THE GROTESQUES OF N'GIBBIDI — ***Thomas Samson Miller***
Witch doctors and *juju* tried to stop *Roach*.

DEUCE HIGH — ***Walter J. Coburn***
He was in a nervous state, so they called him *"Wyoming."*

THE ATLANTIC TAKES A HAND — ***Ralph R. Perry***
A blundering helmsman and a smuggled jewel.

Still Farther Ahead

THE three issues following the next will contain *long* stories by Leonard H. Nason, Robert Simpson, Thomson Burtis, Charles Beadle, Talbot Mundy, Percy Charles Chandler, W. C. Tuttle, Everett Saunders, Gordon MacCreagh and William Byron Mowery; and short stories by S. B. H. Hurst, L. Paul, Alanson Skinner, Henry S. Whitehead, Warren Elliot Carleton, Arthur M. Harris, F. St. Mars, Ernest Lyons, Eugene Cunningham, W. Townend, Rolf Bennett and others; stories of doughboys on the Western Front, second mates on the high seas, missionaries in Alaska, aviators in the oil fields, Romans in ancient Britain, swordfishers off the Grand Banks, cowboys on the Western Range, explorers up the Amazon, adventurers the world around.